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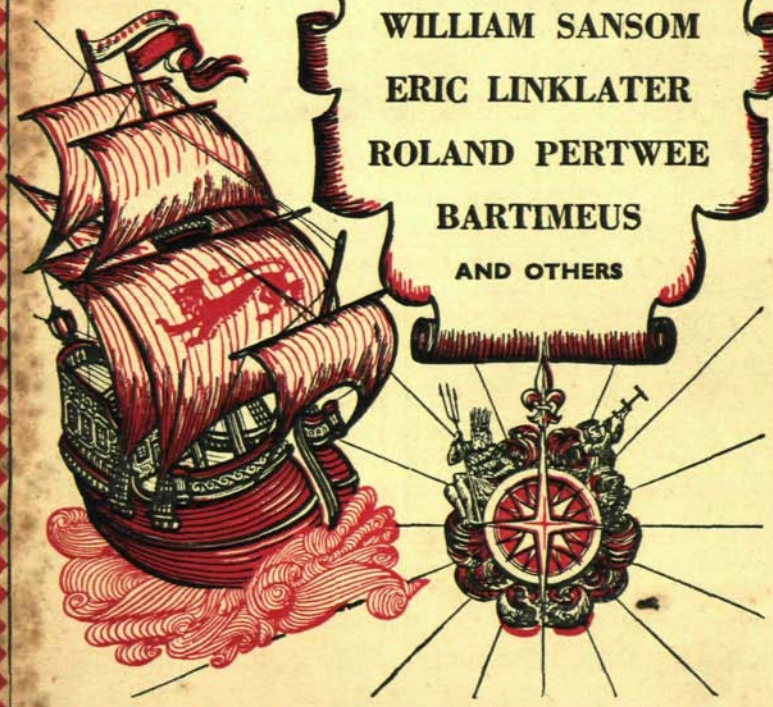

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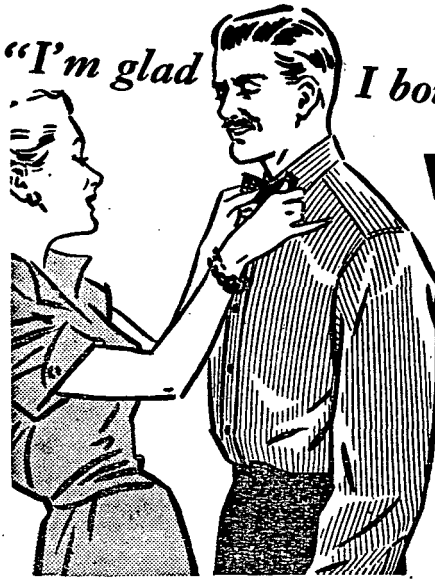

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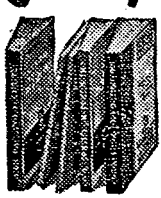

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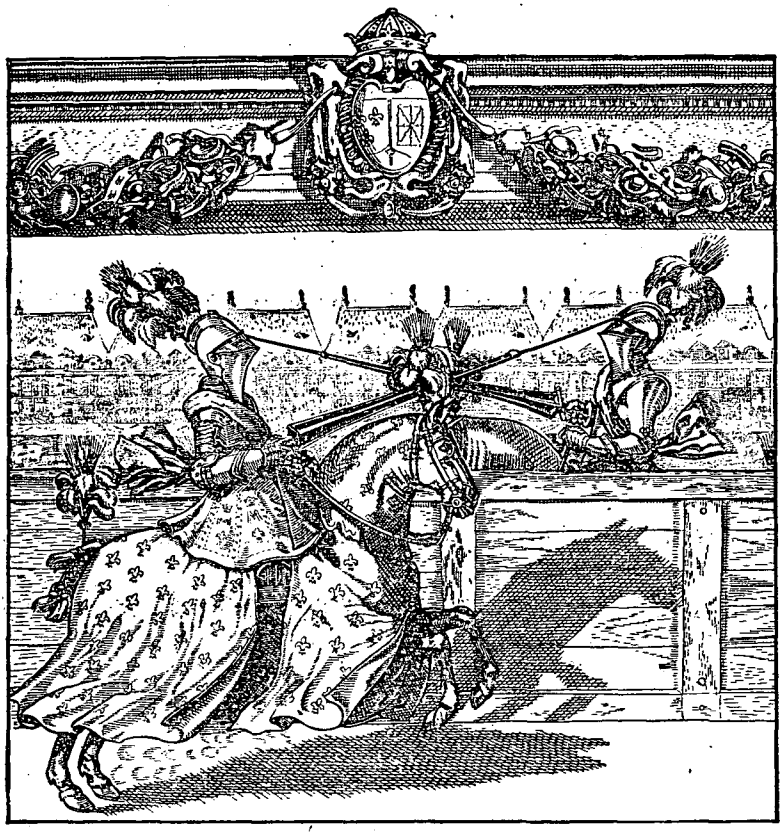

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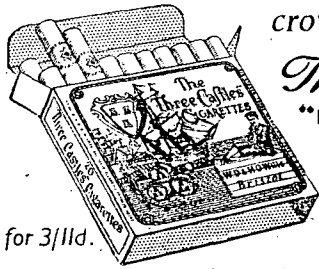


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# ARGOSY

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*Though God hath raised me high,*
*yet this I count the glory of my crown :*
*that I have reigned with your loves.*

QUEEN ELIZABETH I, 1601

*Anointed Queen, here is your crown's true glory.*
*The Coronation joy-bells tell the story.*
*Daughter of Britain's wise and kindliest King,*
*For you they ring :*
*Reign with our loves.*

H. M. RALEIGH

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*Argosy turns the pages of the girlhood diary of Queen Victoria and discovers with renewed pleasure the dazzling clarity and touchingly human interest of her own entertaining account of her Coronation.*

*THURSDAY, 28th June!*—I was awoke at four o'clock by the guns in the Park, and could not get much sleep afterwards on account of the noise of the people, bands, &c., &c. Got up at 7 feeling strong and well; the Park presented a curious spectacle; crowds of people up to Constitution Hill, soldiers, bands, &c. I dressed, having taken a little breakfast before I dressed, and a little after.

At ½ p. 9 I went into the next room dressed exactly in my House of Lords costume; and met Uncle Ernest, Charles and Feodore (who had come a few minutes before into my dressing-room), Lady Lansdowne, Lady Normanby, the Duchess of Sutherland, and Lady Barham, all in their robes.

At 10 I got into the State Coach with the Duchess of Sutherland and Lord Albemarle, and we began our Progress. It was a fine day, and the crowds of people exceeded what I have ever seen; many as there were the day I went to the City, it was nothing—nothing to the multitudes, the millions of my loyal subjects who were assembled in *every spot* to witness the Procession. Their

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good-humour and excessive loyalty was beyond everything, and I really cannot say *how* proud I feel to be the Queen of *such* a *Nation*. I was alarmed at times for fear that the people would be crushed and squeezed on account of the tremendous rush and pressure.

I reached the Abbey amid deafening cheers at a little after ½ p. 11; I first went into a robing-room quite close to the entrance, where I found my eight Train-bearers: Lady Caroline Lennox, Lady Adelaide Paget, Lady Mary Talbot, Lady Fanny Cowper, Lady Wilhelmina Stanhope, Lady Anne Fitzwilliam, Lady Mary Grimston, and Lady Louisa Jenkinson,—all dressed alike and beautifully, in white satin and silver tissue, with wreaths of silver corn-ears in front, and a small one of pink roses round the plait behind, and pink roses in the trimming of the dresses. After putting on my Mantle, and the young ladies having properly got hold of it, and Lord Conyngham holding the end of it, I left the robing-room and the Procession began.

The sight was splendid; the bank of Peeresses quite beautiful, all in their robes, and the Peers on the other side. My young Train-bearers were always near me, and helped me whenever I wanted anything.

The Bishop of Durham stood on one side near me.

At the beginning of the Anthem where I've made a mark, I retired to St. Edward's Chapel, a small dark place immediately behind the Altar, with my Ladies and Train-bearers; took off my crimson robe and kirtle and put on the Supertunica of Cloth of Gold, also in the shape of a kirtle, which was put over a singular sort of little gown of linen trimmed with lace; I also took off my circlet of diamonds, and then proceeded bare-headed into the Abbey; I was then seated upon St. Edward's chair where the Dalmatic robe was clasped round me by the Lord Great Chamberlain.

Then followed all the various things; and last (of those things) the Crown being placed on my head;—which was, I must own, a most beautiful impressive moment; *all* the Peers and Peeresses put on their Coronets at the same instant.

My excellent Lord Melbourne, who stood very close to me throughout the whole ceremony, was *completely* overcome at this moment, and very much affected; he gave me *such* a kind, and I may say *fatherly* look. The shouts, which were very great, the drums, the trumpets, the firing of the guns, all at the same instant, rendered the spectacle most imposing.

The Enthronization and the Homage of, 1st all the Bishops, then my Uncles, and lastly of all the Peers, in their respective order, was very fine. The Duke of Norfolk (holding for me the

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Sceptre with a Cross) with Lord Melbourne, stood close to me on my right, and the Duke of Richmond with the other Sceptre on my left. All my Train-bearers standing behind the Throne.

Poor old Lord Rolle, who is 82 and dreadfully infirm, in attempting to ascend the steps, fell and rolled quite down, but was not the least hurt; when he attempted to re-ascend them I got up and advanced to the end of the steps, in order to prevent another fall.

When Lord Melbourne's turn to do Homage came, there was loud cheering; they also cheered Lord Grey and the Duke of Wellington; it's a pretty ceremony; they first all touch the Crown, and then kiss my hand. When my good Lord Melbourne knelt down and kissed my hand, he pressed my hand and I grasped his with all my heart, at which he looked up with his eyes filled with tears and seemed much touched, as he was, I observed, throughout the whole ceremony.

After the Homage was concluded I left the Throne, took off my Crown and received the Sacrament; I then put on my Crown again, and re-ascended the Throne, leaning on Lord Melbourne's arm; at the commencement of the Anthem I descended from the Throne, and went into St. Edward's Chapel with my Ladies, Train-bearers, and Lord Willoughby, where I took off the Dalmatic robe, Supertunica, and put on the Purple Velvet Kirtle and Mantle, and proceeded again to the Throne, which I ascended leaning on Lord Melbourne's hand.

There was another present at this ceremony, in the box immediately above the Royal Box, and who witnessed all; it was Lehzen, whose eyes I caught when on the Throne, and we exchanged smiles. She and Späth, Lady John Russell and Mr. Murray saw me leave the Palace, arrive at the Abbey, leave the Abbey and again return to the Palace!!

I then again descended from the Throne, and repaired with all the Peers bearing the Regalia, my Ladies and Train-bearers, to St. Edward's Chapel, as it is called; but which, as Lord Melbourne said, was more *unlike* a Chapel than anything he had ever seen; for, what was *called* an *Altar* was covered with sandwiches, bottles of wine, &c. The Archbishop came in and *ought* to have delivered the Orb to me, but I had already got it.

There we waited for some minutes; Lord Melbourne took a glass of wine, for he seemed completely tired; the Procession being formed, I replaced my Crown (which I had taken off for a few minutes), took the Orb in my left hand and the Sceptre in my right, and thus *loaded* proceeded through the Abbey, which resounded with cheers, to the first Robing-room, where I found

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the Duchess of Gloucester, Mamma, and the Duchess of Cambridge with their ladies.

And here we waited for at least an hour, with *all* my ladies and Train-bearers; the Princesses went away about half an hour before I did; the Archbishop had put the ring on the wrong finger, and the consequence was that I had the greatest difficulty to take it off again —which I at last did with great pain. Lady Fanny, Lady Wilhelmina and Lady Mary Grimston looked quite beautiful.

At about ½ p. 4 I re-entered my carriage, the Crown on my head and Sceptre and Orb in my hand, and we proceeded the same way as we came—the crowds if possible having increased. The enthusiasm, affection and loyalty was really touching, and I shall ever remember this day as the *proudest* of my life. I came home at a little after 6,—really *not* feeling tired.

At 8 we dined. Besides we 13, Lord Melbourne and Lord Surrey dined here. Lord Melbourne came up to me and said, "I must congratulate you on this most brilliant day," and that all had gone off *so* well. He said he was not tired and was in high spirits. I sat between Uncle Ernest, and Lord Melbourne, and Lord Melbourne between me and Feodore, whom he had led in.

My kind Lord Melbourne was much affected in speaking of the whole ceremony. He asked kindly if I was tired; said the Sword he carried (the 1st, the Sword of State) was excessively heavy. I said that the Crown hurt me a good deal. He was much amused at Uncle Ernest's being astonished at our still having the Litany; we agreed that the whole thing was a very fine sight. He thought the robes, and particularly the Dalmatic, "looked remarkably well." "And you did it all so well; excellent!" said he with the tears in his eyes.

He said he thought I looked rather pale, and "moved by all the people" when I arrived; "and that's natural."

The Archbishop's and Dean's Copes (which were remarkably handsome) were from James the 1st's time; the very same that were worn at his Coronation, Lord Melbourne told me. Spoke of the Duc de Nemours being like his father in face; of the young ladies' (Train-bearers') dresses which he thought beautiful; and he said he thought the Duchess of Richmond (who had ordered the make of the dresses, and had been much condemned by some of the young ladies for it) quite right.

She said to him, "One thing I was determined about; that I would have no discussion with their Mammas about it."

Spoke of Talleyrand and Soult having been much struck by the ceremony of the Coronation; of the English being far too generous *not* to be kind to Soult. Lord Melbourne went home the

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night before, and slept very deeply till he was woke at 6 in the morning. I said I did not sleep well. Spoke of the Illuminations and Uncle Ernest's wish to see them.

After dinner, before we sat down, we—that is, Charles, Lord Melbourne and I—spoke of the numbers of Peers at the Coronation, which Lord Melbourne said was unprecedented. I observed that there were very few Viscounts; he said, "There are very few Viscounts"; that they were an odd sort of title, and not really English; that they came from Vice-Comités; that Dukes and Barons were the only *real* English titles; that Marquises were likewise not English; and that they made people Marquises when they did not wish to make them Dukes.

Spoke of Lord Audley who came as the 1st Baron, and who Lord Melbourne said was of a very old family; his ancestor was a Sir Something Audley in the time of the Black Prince, who with Chandos gained the Battle of Poitiers.

I then sat on the sofa for a little while with Lady Barham and then with Charles; Lord Melbourne sitting near me the whole evening. Mamma and Feodore remained to see the Illuminations, and only came in later, and Mamma went away before I did. Uncle Ernest drove out to see the Illuminations.

I said to Lord Melbourne when I first sat down, I felt a little tired on my feet; "You must be very tired," he said. Spoke of the weight of the robes, &c.; the Coronets; and he turned round to me, and said *so* kindly, "And you did it beautifully,—every part of it, with so much taste; it's a thing that you can't give a person advice upon; it must be left to a person."

To hear this, from this kind impartial friend, gave me great and real pleasure. Mamma and Feodore came back just after he said this. Spoke of these Bishops' Copes, about which he was very funny; of the Pages, who were such a nice set of boys and who were so handy, Lord Melbourne said, that they kept them near them the whole time.

Little Lord Stafford and Slane (Lord Mountcharles) were Pages to their fathers and looked lovely; Lord Paget was Lord Melbourne's Page and remarkably handy, he said.

Spoke again of the young ladies' dress about which he was very amusing; he waited for his carriage with Lady Mary Talbot and Lady Wilhelmina; he thinks Lady Fanny does not make as much show as other girls, which I would not allow. He set off for the Abbey from his house at ½ p. 8, and was there long before anybody else; he only got home at ½ p. 6, and had to go round by Kensington.

He said there was a large breakfast in the Jerusalem Chamber,

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where they met *before* all began; he said laughing that whenever the clergy or a Dean and Chapter had anything to do with anything, there's sure to be plenty to eat.

Spoke of my intending to go to bed; he said, "You may depend upon it, you are more tired than you think you are."

I said I had slept badly the night before; he said that was my mind, and that nothing kept people more awake than any consciousness of a great event going to take place and being agitated. He was not sure if he was not going to the Duke of Wellington's.

Stayed in the drawing-room till 20 m. p. 11, but remained till 12 o'clock on Mamma's balcony looking at the fireworks in Green Park, which were quite beautiful.

* * *

## *A MASQUE OF QUEENS*

**These are queens who have never reigned except in the imaginations of their creators, and, we hope, in the memories of our readers! Count one point for identifying the queen, one for the play, novel or poem in which she appears, and one for the author, making a possible total of twenty-seven points. The answers are on page 89.**

1. *She gave her hand to a king, but her heart was in the keeping of the commoner who so closely resembled him, and to whom, each year, she sent a red rose.*
2. *A sprat to catch a mackerel, this queen, who protested too much, according to another royal lady.*
3. *She was gay and brisk and bold, but quite adamant on one point—that visitors to her domain should serve her for seven years.*
4. *"Sentence first—verdict afterwards" was the policy of this very absolute monarch who had only one method of dealing with those who displeased her.*
5. *On one night every year she kept vigil for her dead husband, and on the tenth anniversary of his murder there burst in upon her solitude Azrael, the poet-assassin whose hate she turned to love.*
6. *Her reign was to last but one brief, glorious day—sufficient reason for her to ask to be called early!*
7. *Lacking the fascination of Orinthia, the drive of Lysistrata and the mimetic talent of the irrepressible Amanda, she was none the less the power behind the throne.*
8. *When at home she sat in the middle of a frozen lake in one of the vast, empty, palace halls illuminated by the Northern Lights.*
9. *It was to earn this greatest glorious queen's grace and approval that a gentle knight set out on a great adventure, accompanied by a lovely veiled lady riding a white ass.*

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# TAMPERLEY LADIES

**There, on the step where hundreds like them had stood before, were two young officers**

## by JOHN MOORE

WHEN Miss Julie died at the age of seventy she left ten pounds to the Feline Friends' League and the rest of her estate to her two sisters; so after a decent interval they unlocked the safe in her bedroom, counted the money, and divided it equally between them. It amounted to four hundred and forty one pounds each, mostly in those old Treasury notes called Bradburies.

Four years later Miss Rose fell off a step-ladder when she was picking pears and broke her thigh. She died of hypostatic pneumonia in the Cottage Hospital, leaving ten pounds to the Society for the Rehabilitation of Girls in Moral Jeopardy and everything else to Miss Amelia.

It was many weeks before Amelia could bring herself to enter the chintz-curtained bedroom which still smelt of Rose's special pot-pourri; but when at length she did so she abstracted nearly fifteen hundred pounds from the small green safe and transferred it to her own.

She refreshed her memory by reference to *The Manners and Rules of Good Society*, by "A Member of the Aristocracy," and continued in mourning for the appropriate period. Thereafter, however, she began in a modest fashion to Blossom Forth.

It had been Miss Julie's suggestion originally. "Whichever of us is 'left,' dears," she had said one evening, "I think she should Blossom Forth a bit, don't you?" And her two devoted sisters had agreed, though the very idea of any undue extravagance was foreign to their natures.

The daughters of a poor curate, and orphaned in their early twenties, they had set up a Typewriting Bureau in the days when typewriting was considered to be not quite ladylike, and shorthand, then known as phonography, was an accomplishment no refined person would wish to possess.

The Bureau had not, at first, been particularly successful. In its early days Miss Rose had a customer who wrote immense quantities of bad blank verse in imitation of Lord Tennyson; and

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Miss Julie typed, with many blushes, a lady novelist's manuscript quite as outspoken as the works of George Eliot. Miss Amelia was the favourite of a clergyman who liked his sermons to be typewritten; but he wrote only two new ones each year. The notices of Linen Guild Meetings and Church Bazaars brought in a few shillings: a disappointingly small return for their careful labours.

The three girls pinched and saved and made do, until at last a happy accident brought them success and modest riches. The Staff College moved to Tamperley Heath; and the Commandant, driven to distraction by the spidery scrawls of its junior officers, issued an instruction that all essays should be submitted in triplicate and *typed*.

After that life was a good deal easier for the girls, and, it must be admitted, much more pleasant. Instead of the lady novelist, the clergyman, and the bearded gentleman whom they daringly spoke of as the Blank Poet, there came to the sisters' cosy little sitting-room a succession of dashing young men in riding-breeches and beautifully polished boots.

"Type this, Julie," they would say, "and for heaven's sake correct the spelling—*The Strategic Importance of the Sudan to Great Britain.*"

Or, "Awful jolly old bore, what?"—as the gallant captain twirled his moustache—"*Problems of Ammunition Supply where Pack-Animals are Subject to Attack by Tsetse*—can hardly expect you to know much about *that*, Amelia, eh, what?"

Nevertheless, they learnt; it was surprising how quickly they learnt. They soon knew exactly how many Hotchkiss guns were allotted to a cavalry division and how many tons of hay and oats were required by a battery of Horse Artillery in a week. They were familiar with *Infantry Training Parts I and II* and could deliver you a long discourse, if you asked them, on *The Disciplinary Value of Ceremonial Drill.*

They would often discuss, over the afternoon tea-cups, such matters as *Turkey's Position in Relation to the Balance of Power*, or *The Political and Military Situation of Montenegro in the Event of Hostilities in the Balkans.* Indeed, soon after the war broke out in 1914, General O'Malley Smith-Rogers, then commanding the College, declared jocularly when he encountered the three sisters after Church one Sunday:

"Upon my soul, I've a good mind to have you young ladies interned!"

"*Interned?*" they fluttered.

"Yes. You know too much," he laughed.

When he had gone, they exchanged uncomfortable glances.

"Do you think he could have meant it?" asked Amelia.

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" Doubtless it was just his fun," said Julie. " But all the same, it makes one—"

" Yes. We shall have to be very careful," put in Rose swiftly; and the subject was not mentioned between them again.

The sisters' heyday, if such even and tranquil lives as theirs can be said to have a heyday, occurred between the two wars, by which time they had become a sort of established institution at Tamperley Heath.

Those of their earlier clients, who had escaped being killed, were now full colonels and generals, often with sons of their own in the Army. " So you're going to Tamperley, my boy?" they would say. " Then take this little note of introduction to Amelia, Julie and Rose. *You'll need 'em.*"

Before long the sisters' scrap-book was quite filled with these letters, written on the notepaper of the Cavalry Club, the Guards' Club, the Army and Navy, the Junior Army and Navy, the United Service, the Junior United Service, the Naval and Military, and so on. *My dear Girls*—for these greying warriors still thought of them as girls—*Please look after young Almeric, like you looked after us!*

Sometimes, when the handwriting was particularly atrocious, and therefore had stuck in the memory, one or other of the sisters would shed over it a sentimental tear.

The new generation, they found, was only superficially different from the old one. Instead of speaking of " gals " it spoke of " popsies;" instead of riding horses it rode motor bikes; its moustaches were smaller and it was more apt to drop cigarette-ash on the sitting-room carpet.

But in fundamentals it was unchanged. It couldn't spell, it knew nothing about geography, history or politics and precious little about military strategy, and its handwriting had been ruined for ever in its school-days by writing out lines at high speed—sometimes with a pen ingeniously devised to hold four nibs and so write four lines at once.

The courses came and went as regularly as the seasons; and like a remembered rhythm the sisters recognized the Set Subjects as they turned up again and again:

*Tactics at Quatre-Bras and Waterloo, Strategic Importance of the Channel Ports, New Problems Arising out of Mechanization, Advantages of Cavalry in Relation to Light Tanks, Use (if any) of Tanks in Unfavourable Terrain.*

The sisters knew them all by heart; they could see into the minds of the examiners as some people are said to understand the minds of the setters of crossword puzzles; and indeed they

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probably knew more about strategy than the examiners themselves. It was on May Day 1940 that Miss Amelia, cracking open her egg at breakfast, looked up and said suddenly:

"If *I* were Hitler, my dears—"

"Yes, dear?" said Julie and Rose.

"If *I* were Hitler, I should attack through the Ardennes."

"I had, myself, come independently to the same conclusion," said Julie.

Rose nodded. "So had I. But hush," she said. "Walls have ears."

They did not, however, often talk shop, as they called it, in their spare time. Rose would chatter away about her bantams and what brown eggs they laid; Julie about her bees; and Amelia about the visitors to her bird-table on the lawn. The arrival of the bulb-catalogues in the autumn, and the seed-catalogues in the spring, sent them all three into an excited flutter, and kept them busy for days discussing whether they could afford the latest daffodils or delphiniums.

The war, strangely enough, hardly altered the rhythm of their lives; but on the rare occasions when it crept into the conversation, they were almost professionally dispassionate. "The loss of Singapore," Amelia calmly observed one day, "is, of course, a foregone conclusion."

Two years later Rose privately predicted both the date and place of the Normandy landings; and Julie was only a month out in her prophesy of when the war in Europe would end.

She did not, however, live to see the end. Early in 1945 she was buried in the village churchyard and three generals saluted at her graveside. Rose followed her in 1949. So Amelia was left alone to Blossom Forth as best she could.

Miss Amelia bought some nesting-boxes for the birds, a new typewriter, a new dress, a new hat, and two bulbs of a most expensive new iris called Ophelia. *A light rosy flesh-pink deepening a little at the throat which is lit up by a bright apricot beard. No venation or shading*, said the catalogue, *mars the exquisite and breath-taking beauty of this flower.*

She also, almost as an afterthought, bought a new house; and this rash act, as you will see, had disastrous consequences.

It was a small Queen Anne house, which all her life she had coveted, tucked away behind a high-walled garden at the end of the village street. Its walls were covered with honeysuckle, wistaria and clematis, among which the soft orange-pink brick of its gracious period glowed with a sort of inner light whenever the sun shone.

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It was, indeed, a warm-hearted, kindly and good-mannered house, of which she was sure Rose and Julie would have approved, and when it came unexpectedly into the market Amelia blossomed forth with a vengeance. She bought it for four thousand pounds, and raided her safe for four hundred-pound bundles of notes to pay the deposit.

Three months later, when it was time to complete the purchase, she raided the safe again. Three frugal women can save a lot of money in fifty years if they set their minds to it, and Amelia had no difficulty whatever in finding the necessary three thousand six hundred, though counting out the notes somewhat tired her eyes. She packed the bundles in a suitcase and set out by bus for her solicitor's office in the near-by town.

She was particularly sorry that the senior partner was dead, for he had been an old friend of the family, and among other kindnesses he had dealt with the Income Tax returns of all the sisters every year for nothing; it would have been a pleasure to transact this exciting piece of business with him and he would have understood, Amelia thought, the essential rightness of her Blossoming Forth. The junior partner, whom she had never previously met, was a red-haired, bespectacled, rather gauche young man whom she instantly described to herself as "callow."

"Ah, yes, The Limes," he said, peering short-sightedly at some documents on his desk. "We shall complete the purchase with the vendor's solicitors tomorrow; a mere formality, of course, since the deeds are perfectly in order. You will no doubt want to write me out a cheque for the balance of the money?"

"There is no need for a cheque," said Amelia. "I have the money here." She indicated the small suitcase which she had set on the floor.

The lawyer looked puzzled.

"In cash?" he said at last.

"In notes. I keep only a small balance of money at the bank."

She opened the suitcase and as casually as a bank clerk laid the bundles of notes one by one on the table: the Bradburies neatly labelled in her prim handwriting, "£100 in £1's," "£50 in 10/-'s," and so on, the crisp fivers which hadn't seen the light of day for thirty or forty years.

The lawyer watched her with a quaint disapproval. His sense of propriety was shocked by the idea of a little old lady carrying thousands of pounds about in an old suitcase. What were banks for? he asked himself. With all these tough cosh-boys about, she was lucky not to have been knocked on the head. He said almost irritably:

"If I may say so, Madam, it is somewhat imprudent—"

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"Nonsense!" said Amelia sharply. "I have an excellent safe of the most reliable make."

"One reads," he went on, "such dreadful stories in the papers, of helpless people murdered in their beds for much less."

"We have no murderers at Tamperley Heath," said Amelia sharply. "Nor, young man, am I accustomed to being described as helpless."

Perhaps he, likewise, was unaccustomed to being addressed as "young man" by his clients; perhaps her tone angered him; perhaps he was just one of those people who like to make the simplest transactions seem fraught with difficulty and peril. At any rate he sat staring at the bundles of notes and drumming with his fingers on the desk, and then said suddenly:

"I think, Madam, that my firm makes out your Income Tax returns?"

"That is so," said Amelia. "Is it relevant?"

"I feel it is my duty to warn you," he said, "that the Inspector of Taxes is very hot, nowadays—"

"Hot?"

"I should have said inquisitive, especially where deals in property are concerned—which of course are always reported to his office."

Amelia rose from her chair.

"Young man," she said, "I shall be obliged if you will kindly explain yourself."

"For your own good, Madam, I am pointing out that the Inspector—in view of the very—er—modest earnings shown in your annual returns—*may* feel it his business to ask you some questions. Doubtless you have a ready explanation."

"Of what?"

He ignored her question, and continued rather pompously, as if he were lecturing his local branch of the Law Society:

"The—er—technique adopted by the Inland Revenue in such cases is to assess the taxpayer on some high and arbitrary figure. The taxpayer is thus compelled to pay up or make a satisfactory explanation to the Commissioners. But as I say," he added, "if you can explain the matter, you have nothing to fear."

Amelia did not easily lose her temper; and it was in a tone of ice (although her heart was pounding and her thin hands were trembling in her lap) that she now addressed this impudent upstart of a lawyer.

"I can certainly explain it. If you really want to know, the money was what we called Windfalls."

"Windfalls, Madam?"

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"Gifts," said Amelia very precisely, enunciating every word, "entirely unsolicited, from the young gentlemen for whom we typed."

The lawyer stared at her. The tiresome drumming of his fingers on the table became an agitated tattoo. He stared; and he saw sitting before him a prim, elderly, thin-lipped spinster wearing a black velvet band round her neck and speaking calmly and precisely of unsolicited gifts. It sank into his consciousness that the amount involved was three thousand six hundred pounds; and it was to his credit that he actually blushed.

"My sisters, Miss Julie and Miss Rose," went on Amelia inexorably, "were also the recipients of these gifts. They were in return for certain little services, but as I have already told you, we called them Windfalls. That is all."

The lawyer's mouth opened and shut, but no words came. He was now as red as a beetroot; and Amelia, who couldn't understand why he was blushing, thought privately that he was not only a boor but a fool.

He hurriedly signed a receipt for three thousand six hundred pounds and with a hand that trembled even more than hers passed the conveyance across the desk for her signature. At last, controlling his voice with difficulty, he said:

"And that is the explanation which you will make, if necessary, to the Commissioners of Inland Revenue?"

"Certainly."

He got up to show her out. "In that case, Madam"—and there was a certain unwilling admiration in the look he gave her as he stiffly bowed—"in that case, you may be quite sure the money is not taxable. It would not be in the public interest to tax such—gifts."

It was not until four o'clock on the following morning that Amelia understood what he had meant.

She had led an extremely sheltered life. The most "advanced" book she had ever read was *Vanity Fair;* and she had deeply disapproved of it. The edition of Shakespeare upon which the sisters had been brought up was that of Doctor Bowdler, designed for reading in the family circle; from the Bible Readings which they took part in every Friday of their adult lives, certain passages were by mutual consent omitted. She had heard, vaguely, that there were Women of a Certain Class, but neither she nor Julie nor Rose had ever discussed them.

As the church clock struck four, and the bantam cock began to crow, it suddenly occurred to her that they, too, received unsolicited gifts for Services Rendered; and with an instinctive

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gesture of shame and disgrace she buried herself, night-cap and all, under the bed-clothes.

There in the still and stuffy dark she lay and shuddered. She thought of Rose and Julie lying in their cold graves, and how her foolish confession to the young lawyer had tarnished their innocent memories. She thought of those colonels and generals, respected members of the Cavalry Club, the Guards', the Army and Navy, the Junior Army and Navy, the United Service, the Junior United Service, the Naval and Military, Boodle's, White's.

Before her tightly closed eyes they passed in procession, splendid and moustached, in the days of their youth—Dragoon, Lancer and Hussar, Guardsman, Highlander, Borderer, Rifleman, Gurkha, Gunner, even a few mad, married or Methodist, the Royal Engineers; buff riding-breeches, gaily swinging kilts, plaid trousers; back-badge of the Gloucesters, black flash of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, bursting bomb and *Ubique* of the Royal Artillery . . .

She heard again the clatter of their horses' hoofs as they rode up to the cottage gate; booted and spurred they strode down the garden path and knocked on the green door:

"Hullo, Julie. Hullo, Amelia. Art'noon, Rose! Awful jolly old bore, what? Look, I've put it down, *Karl von Clausevitz and his Phillosophy of War as Ekspounded in 'Vom Kriege.'* That's what we've got to write about, and slap in the middle of the huntin' season too! And I can't even spell the old buffer's name!"

"Yes, it's a W, not a V," said Julie, smiling at his scribbled spelling of the title of his essay.

"Put it right for me, Julie, there's a pet."

And that was how it all began. *Facilis descensus Averni!*—for soon: "I haven't a word of German. Have you?"

"We had a German governess once," smiled Rose. "In our palmy days." (Palmy on two hundred and fifty a year!)

"Then find us a jolly old quotation, something really stodgy that'll impress the examiners, something about the tactics at Waterloo—"

Easy the descent; from the spelling mistakes tactfully corrected—"I ventured to put right one or two little slips, Captain Featherstonehaugh"—to the skilfully inserted quotation, the apt example from Napoleon, the historical reference neatly slipped in . . . and so, heaven help them all three, to the whole essay.

Oh, it was dreadfully wrong, Amelia knew, but the boys were so stupid and they were so keen on their hunting and their polo that they never had time to study; even if they'd possessed the brains!

And she hadn't done it for the money, neither she nor Julie

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nor Rose had ever asked for a penny apart from the typing at one shilling and sixpence per thousand words; but when the young gentlemen got through and were dignified with the letters PSC (passed Staff College) after their names in the Army List making them sure of promotion—well then, of course, it was very nice to receive those not entirely unexpected envelopes with such grateful letters and the five-pound notes discreetly folded up inside.

"Hurray, Julie! Here's another Windfall!"

They were dear, deserving boys, with such good manners. And now, oh heavens, she had besmirched them and dragged them in the mud before that filthy-minded boor, who even now perhaps lay in bed chuckling over his horrible, wicked thoughts!

However tightly she screwed up her eyes, Amelia seemed to see the captains and majors striding down the path between the rose-pergolas; and in this waking nightmare of hers they pointed accusing fingers at her through the sitting-room window and asked: "Did we not treat you in every respect as an Officer and a Gentleman should treat a Lady?"

They did, oh they did! Never a stroll down the back-garden path, never a squeeze of the hand, never a kiss, sighed Amelia, never a kiss!

Early in the morning she dressed and crept down to the churchyard, where she stood for a few moments beside her sisters' graves. It was her way of asking their forgiveness, and also of saying goodbye; for it was quite clear to her that she could no longer remain at Tamperley.

Returning to the cottage she lit a fire, although it was high summer, and like some hurriedly-departing diplomat she burned her papers. As the last typewritten sheet went brown and curled up like an autumnal bracken-frond she read that fading title on the top of it—*Superiority of Cavalry to Armoured Cars for Reconnaissance*—and knew that it belonged indeed to the dead past. The fire blazed up, the flames took it, and it was gone.

And then, suddenly, came a knock at the door.

So strong was Amelia's sense of guilt that it was all she could do to prevent herself from fleeing upstairs and locking herself in her bedroom. At last, her heart fluttering, she opened the door.

There stood before it, on the step where hundreds like them had stood before, two young officers in uniform. They saluted smartly.

"Hullo, Aunt Amelia." (The young ones had begun to call her Aunt about 1920.) "Got a problem for you. *Possible Use of Eritrea as a Base in Certain Eventualities.* Hardly *heard* of Eritrea. Has it got any water-supplies, do you think? Any mosquitoes?

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Any port ? Mug up something for us, Auntie, there's a poppet . . ."

Suddenly the young man realized that he was addressing the green door. It had closed with a slam. Amelia had muttered something which he hadn't properly heard, something about "liable to be misconstrued." He looked bewilderedly at his companion and shrugged his shoulders.

"Old dame going crackers ?" he said.

"She looked as mad as a March hare. Her hair all over the place. And did you see that blazing fire—on a hot day like this ?"

"Oh well, I suppose she's about a hundred. My pop—and he's fifty-five—said she got *him* through Staff College just after the first shemozzle. He'd never have passed otherwise, he said. And now he's a blooming General !"

"Looks like we've had it," said the other officer.

"Had it. I should think so. Company Officers, you and me, for the rest of our days. Where the hell *is* Eritrea ?"

They shrugged their shoulders and walked away.

And now I am not sure, really, whether I should have told you this story. There is, after all, a question of security involved.

But even the Russians must be aware that, for some time now, far fewer of our officers have passed the Staff Course ; and if their Intelligence is any good at all they have probably seen a photostat copy, smuggled out of the War Office, of that famous document in which the Secretary of State thoroughly rapped the knuckles of General Sir Brackenbury Blough, until recently Commandant of the establishment, for the "almost elementary-school standard" of the essays on military history and strategy.

In any case, I don't suppose it matters if they know ; it will not do their morale much good. For if Amelia doesn't return—and I'm pretty sure she won't, for she's hiding in a little flat at Bexhill-on-Sea—we shall very soon have no Staff Officers left ; and then perhaps we shall win our first, as well as our last, battles.

* * *

## *YOU CAN'T HAVE YOUR CAKE AND—*

One evening at the Villa Mauresque, Somerset Maugham wanted a book to read in bed.

"What a pity," he said, "that I wrote *Cakes and Ale*. It would be the very thing."

LOUIS MARLOW, *Seven Friends*

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# HURRICANE

**Chance had thrown those two into a ridiculous race towards death**

## by MACKENZIE COTTRELL

SHERIFF MARKS was a good man with a boat, but the boy he was following handled a boat like some young god of the sea. Five hours ago the sheriff had thought, *The young fool is running himself into weather he don't reckon on !* Now he knew, as he should have known before, that the youth in the boat was no fool—unless the recklessness of courage itself was folly—and that the boat was deliberately headed into hurricane.

It was something that simply did not happen. Governments spent millions on weather services whose main object was to keep people out of hurricanes. At their warning, great liners solemnly changed course, schooners fled like doves before the hawk, little boats of the coasts hid timidly in rivers, creeks and bays.

Yet before the sheriff a cockle-shell of a sloop was steered flyingly and beautifully into ever worsening weather, that fringed weather that was racing seas, strong gales, whole gales, and the force twelve of hurricane. The sheriff had known of the storm two days ago while the chase was still overland but he had assumed that the boy, cut off from weather forecasts, could not know it.

Two hours ago the boy had settled that. Putting one foot on the tiller, he had stood up and turned his back to the wind, raised his left arm to shoulder level and curved the fingers of his left hand slightly forward. Then he had sat down and steered for the point of the compass towards which the fingers had pointed. He had used one of the variations of the Buys Ballot law for determining the position of the centre of an advancing hurricane—and the boy was steering for the centre.

For the last hour the sheriff had thought, *He's bluffing—and I don't bluff !* Half an hour ago he had amended it to, *By gum, he may not be bluffing at that !* Now, incredulous, astounded, somehow touched, he made a further amendment, with a quickening of the heart, *He isn't bluffing—and I've got to make the best of it !*

He stood up to get a better view of the boy. From the leaping boat a quarter of a mile ahead, the boy waved to him. Rain stung

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over them, hissing on the grey of the frothing sea, and a great restlessness sighed across the skies. If they were going to get ashore, they had to get ashore soon.

Rain that cried as it flew blotted out the boat ahead and hurt the sheriff's skin. Then the boat ahead came into view again and its occupant blew the sheriff a kiss. And the sheriff admitted that the man ahead might be a murderer, but he was no coward.

The man in the boat ahead was too good a seaman not to know that he was flying towards death, but, if he could not shake off the sheriff and reach one of the thousand island hide-outs of the Keys—whence he could vanish into the lost man's land of the West Indies—he certainly had to take the sheriff with him.

Admittedly it would be a splendid death, with sea and sky screaming a requiem at which earth trembled as at an earthquake, but the sheriff wished to live. He sat down and scratched his blond head.

The boats pounded on. The racing grey skies ran lower. The rain squalls increased. Above them the whole great wheel of the sky was turning to the counter-clockwise spin of the advancing hurricane. Already it was doubtful if they could make the Keys, that lay below the sky to the east. And if they ran for the open Gulf, trying for what an irate mariner had once described as the allegedly navigable quadrant of the storm, the weather was still likely to be such that they would be swamped.

The sheriff took out his handkerchief. He fastened it to the shrouds and it stood out stiffly as a small but insistent flag of truce. Then he brought the boat into the wind. Ahead, the boy's boat also came into the wind. The sheriff lit his pipe—with difficulty—and kept his hands about it.

After a few moments, the boy's boat skirted warily back towards him, keeping just beyond easy gun range. In the flying rain, the boy was dark and wildly beautiful; wide of shoulder and slim-hipped, he stood in the climbing and falling boat without taking his hands from his hips, steering with one high-arched and bare foot.

"What d'you want?" His voice came across the water faintly through the whistle of the wind.

Keeping his hands about his pipe, the sheriff shouted reasonably, "This is getting us nowhere!"

The boy laughed. "That's what you think! . . . It's gettin' us inter a blow, mister, that's where it's gettin' us! . . . Ever seen a hurricane at sea, Sher'ff? Or only from a nice, safe house? Ever seen th' sea when th' wind's blowin' so th' sea an' th' air gets mixed so you drowns without gettin' under water? . . . Well, you're goin' to!"

"Give it up, son! You aren't a fish yourself!" the sheriff

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shouted mildly. " Come on in ahead of me and I'll do what I can to make it easy for you."

" You an' your Aunt Maria ! " the young voice came back to him. " You an' who else ? "

" You're sure to die this way. Come back and you have a chance."

" Go back an' you've a chance," the boy shouted. " Ain't much o' a chance now—nex' minute it can be no chance at all . . . Go on back, law-man ! Want t' see your friends again ? "

" Certainly," the sheriff agreed. " But I don't intend going back."

" Reckon we'll see who changes his mind first," the boy shouted. He put the flying boat about and resumed his course into the storm. His hand made a rude gesture at his nose. The sheriff sighed, unhitched the handkerchief and resumed the course.

" Why don' you take a shot now you've got me in range ? " the boy yelled down the wind. The sheriff slightly corrected his own boat on to the course of the boy's. " You can tell 'em I drowned ! " the boy taunted. " ' Sher'ff fearlessly follers crim'nal inter ragin' hurricane ! Sees pris'ner perish ! ' Sounds good, Sher'ff—an' nothin' ain't goin' t' sound nohow if you don't go back right now."

Rain washed down the sheriff's face in sheets. He wondered why he did not go back. Duty ? Pride ? Anger ? The determination not to let the young squirt in the boat ahead laugh at him ? All perhaps . . .

Bitterly, he realized that if he had not been easy with the boy, the boy would never have got away to make that dash for the boats at the unattended dock on one of the loneliest sections of the coast. That the boat into which the sheriff had jumped to follow him was fast enough to follow him but not fast enough to overtake him was simply an unpleasant joke which chance had played on him. That the boy, whom the sheriff had known and liked for years, was charged with murder, and had had nothing to say in his own defence, so that the only assumption was that there had been nothing to say—that was a grimmer joke still.

Scud whistled against the sails. The sheriff struggled with his wet pipe. If he had been a family man he might have gone back. But he wasn't married, and he was proud of his record of never losing a man. Chance had put him and this youth in this ridiculous race towards death, in boats that were almost evenly matched, and for reasons he could not work out he could not give up.

And the weather grew worse, the great flight of the clouds more dizzying. Both boats were running under reefed sails, and what canvas they carried would not last long.

The chase resolved itself into a question of whose sails would rip out first. The sheriff's did. The boat went broadside to the

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wind and heeled over with scud flying from the upper gunwales and water lapping horridly over the lower. The sheriff threw out the improvised sea-anchor he had prepared for the contingency—and as the anchor tautened the rope, the boat slowly righted itself and for a moment rode steady to the blast.

Then the rope parted, the boat went broadside again on the face of a climbing wave and the sheriff was calmly sorry that he would not see his town again or go fishing again down the long waterways of the Glades under the shadow of the clouds. He also had a moment of worry about his dog. Then the descending boom hit him, and glanced across his shoulder to strike the side of his head.

He came to in the bottom of the boat over which white scud was racing. Above him crouched two dungaree-clad legs. Above the legs rose a young, brown torso and one brown arm was holding to the gunnel while the other wound a bandage round the sheriff's head. Dark eyes, heavily lashed, looked down into his mockingly.

The sheriff said, "The mast is the wrong colour." The long-lashed eyes jeered. "Ain't in your old home boat, mister."

The sheriff struggled and a young hand with the strength of steel pushed him down. "Don't want t' go swimmin' again, do you?"

The sheriff felt his jaw. "It ain't broken," the boy's voice said. "Arm is." Water flew over them in sheets. Whether it was sea or rain the sheriff did not know. The boat rode beautifully into the wind, cushioning smoothly on the weighted rope to its sea-anchor.

The sheriff said, "Thanks," and after some time, he asked, "how did you do it?"

The young eyes were scornful. "Key folks don't aim t' go boatin' only on calm days, mister." He smiled for the first time. "Ah seen you go divin'. Seemed like you wasn't comin' out again so Ah come back."

They regarded each other and the sheriff smiled weakly. On one of the boy's lean hips was a bulge where the sheriff's gun was holstered inside the boy's trousers. After several more moments the sheriff asked, "How long do we keep afloat?"

"Not long now, I reckon. You hurtin' bad?"

The sheriff tried to move and grimaced. "I've been more comfortable."

A sea broke over them and the boy bailed. Before he had gained on the sluicing flood, another foaming crest was on them. The sheriff managed to sit up—and the wind tore at his hair and hurt his nostrils and ears. He shouted, "Give me a can!" They fought the water and always the seas came faster as the howling spray became

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an agony on the flesh. At intervals, the boy clawed his way forward and adjusted the bridle of the sea-anchor, in part controlling the drift of the boat, and peered into the smoking grey astern.

"Reckon Beetle Key oughta be somewheres astern of us," he shouted, resuming the steady swing of his bailing. "If th' sea ain't right over it."

Through the shriek of wind and the strange cry of the sea, there was now an endless rumble that came from all horizons, from the sky above and seemingly from the sea below and from the shaken earth below the floor of the sea. It was a sound as deep as thunder but more rapid, like all the freight trains of the world, yet so vast that all the freight trains of the world would be puny beside it. It was the true and most frightening sound of hurricane.

"Ain't goin' t' be long now!" the boy said, and the sheriff understood only by reading his lips. He knew that it would not be long. He was astounded that it had been as long as it had been. Only a seaman born to the sea could have kept the boat afloat until now. Moreover, they were drowning so that they choked with every breath, for sea and sky were mixing in a crying grey fog. Then suddenly, in the flying mist astern, the black and twisted shapes of mangroves showed, lashed by foaming surf, bending like watery grass in a world of driving water.

"Beetle Key," the boy said calmly. The boat tottered up a crest, descended awkwardly, stern first into a valley of water, rose higher yet and came down like an elevator amongst tree tops, tilted completely sideways and wedged momentarily between two trunks.

The sheriff fell out and was sucked down into the mass of roots and branches. Then water was boiling up again and he felt a hand grab the back of his collar. The boat stuck where it was, but the sheriff and the boy went inland amongst boiling foam, feet-thick masses of jetsam and broken boards.

"Oughta be some—right big mangrove—adown water!" the boy gasped, still calmly. "Yep, there's one yonder!"

But what they had fallen into was not water. It was a rolling, churning, thrusting barricade of wreckage: the temporarily collected loot of the Straits of Florida. Blankets of turtle grass mixed with blankets of foam, that lifted and flew down the wind; trails of entangling kelp as thick as a man's wrist looped like rubber ropes through fragments of weathered packing-cases, splintered boards and astonished shell-fish which appeared and disappeared slimily.

Over and through the tippling masses, water boiled, sucked and surged, and from the water and over it there drove a stinging mist of water mixed with just about enough air to prolong the agony of attempting to breathe. Visibility was reduced to a few yards of

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howling and whistling vapour. Driving sheets of wet sand stung like abrasives shot from a gun.

Now the sheriff and the boy were on top of the seething masses, now they were buried under a toppling cascade of sticks, seaweed and foam. And each time they went down the sheriff knew the trapped horror of believing that they could not reach the air again, of bursting lungs, and the stab of thinking, *This is death.* And each time as he scrabbled with one-armed futility, the lithe and squirming wild thing beside him pulled him up again.

The sheriff was as fond of life as anyone, and he was not a man to give up lightly, but he knew an impossibility when he saw it. As they struggled to the quaking surface for the fourth time, he yelled, "Let—go—of—me! We can't—make it!"

The wild thing whose face was bleeding and down whose forehead the dark hair thrashed and tugged in the fury of the wind laughed back at him. "Ah reckon we can. Ole mangrove ain't so fur aways now."

A blast such as they had not yet experienced momentarily flattened the marine quagmire and agonized the ears and throat by its air pressure. Through it the boy tugged steadily towards the tree they could no longer see. A sideways rolling log wallowed in from the sea. The boy thrust the sheriff down into the maelstrom and sank beside him, and the log rolled and blundered over them. Then they fetched up scrapingly against the great mangrove that was shuddering under the impact of tide and wind. The boy twisted a length of rope round the sheriff's body, holding him in the fork of the tree, then climbed far up the bending trunk, locked his own legs about one of the branches and began carefully to cut off the tree top. It seemed he had hardly nicked the wood before the tree broke with a report like a small cannon and the leafy head was swirling away with wind and surf.

"Wish it were a coconut," the boy said. "But guess we can't be choosy."

Even with its leafy head gone, their perch trembled as a bent bow or as a wharf-piling does in a flood. The tide drew at their knees. Surf flew over them chokingly and each wave seemed higher. For the first time, the sheriff thought lovingly of the tenacity of mangrove roots. They could breathe only by pressing their lips to the trunk and sheltering their mouths with their hands, and twice they were forced to move higher up the shorn giant. And still the water rose steadily until they had to breathe as the trough of a swell sucked past, then hold their breath and cling madly to the tree as the next crest rushed over them.

Night came, and the only light was the racing snow of the swells and the pallid ghosts of flying spindrift.

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But finally there was lessening of the wind. It was still a great gale, but the force that is inconceivable except to those who have experienced it was no longer there. One contended merely with mighty wind and marching seas, not with disintegration. This was a wind possible to the northern world, not the suddenly flaming madness of the tropics.

Slowly the sea dropped through the flying rain. "Ain't goin' t' get centre," the boy croaked hoarsely. "She musta passed t' east o' us. Round th' centre mighta been bad."

"It's good we only had a breeze," the sheriff croaked with irony. "I'd have hated to see a wind!"

With the drowned dawn, came sighing rain, drifting across the emerging Key, from which the boat was gone. They descended the tree and fell at full stretch upon the seaweed blankets. The sheriff's head was on a branch, but after long consideration he decided that the branch was better than the effort of moving his head.

Once he was wakened by getting his mouth against the turtle grass and suffocation compelled him to move his head sideways. During the anguish of the move, he noted with surprise that black night had returned. When he awoke again, the drenched rose of a softly raining dawn was again about them.

Twenty feet away, the boy was asleep on his back, dark-lashed, helplessly relaxed, like some young drowned thing flung up by the storm. After agony, the sheriff sat up. After greater suffering, he got to his knees and crawled inch by inch towards the boy.

As he crawled he felt sick, for if the oceans had sunk to calm, the first great emotional storm of a simple and honest life was twisting within the sheriff. Always he had done his duty and obeyed and upheld the law, disregarding personal safety, crooked politicians, the tug of personal friendships.

It had never occurred to him that he might tangle with a problem that the simplicity of the law did not fully answer. He had believed unquestioningly that the wrongs of the world were due to violations of the law, but, crawling to enforce that law, he had no glow of being right . . .

Instead he had irrelevant memories as if from a long way off. One was of the boy, even younger then, working doggedly in the sheriff's grove. When paying him, the sheriff had asked, "Going dancing?" The wild face had smiled at him. "Not likely. Ma's allers wanted t' see New Orleans. Ah'm payin' her fare."

The other memories were of the man, Swale, whom the boy had killed. One was a vignette of Swale and some of his friends driving too fast in a flashy car and of an old tomcat, head high and buzzing with pride like a swarm of bees as he carried home a rat—and of the

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car swerving deliberately to strike him. The men in the car had sworn it was an accident—and, in any case, the law didn't set much store by a cat. The cat had happened to be the sheriff's and when the present case came up he had reminded himself that he must not let the memory influence him.

The other picture was several years old now, of a girl from the Glades, a young thing, jolly as a puppy, who had ceased playing and drowned herself amongst the water-lilies. Everyone had known that Swale had seduced her, but she had had no kin except an old aunt, and Swale had got away with it . . .

None of the pictures altered the law. But if the sheriff had been God, how would God have judged ?

Well, he wasn't God but a sworn law-man who kept crawling noiselessly. Only when his hand was within an inch of the gun did he move fast. Then his hand darted, unclipped the holster flap, clenched on the gun stock and levelled the gun as he collapsed backwards onto his scraped buttocks.

The boy's eyes had opened and he sat up, slowly but still gracefully. Regarding the gun in the sheriff's hand, he said, " Reckon Ah overslept."

He drew up his knees, closed his arms lightly about them, and regarded the sea, across which the dark and rosy light was turning to watery steel. Against broken mangroves and heaped wreckage, the fading hurricane surf broke sighingly. " What you aim t' do ? " the boy asked, without taking his gaze from the surf.

The sheriff cleared his throat. " Why did you do it ? "

" Ah reckon that's ma business," the boy said, and picked up a ribbon of seaweed.

" It's not if you put yourself in my shoes," the sheriff said with heat. He too picked up a ribbon of weed and chewed it. " It's all very well for you to sit there playing strong and silent, but try looking at it from my side of the fence. You killed a man. He wasn't any good, but you can't go about shooting men just because they aren't any good, or we'd have a bad reduction in the population." A slight grin touched the boy's torn cheek.

" Well, I go out to get you," the sheriff said. " I don't like it for I've always liked you—even though you are a crazy young fool."

His exasperation mounted and the one illegal suggestion of his life burst from him. " If you had a good reason for bumping Swale off, why in thunder did you have to do it in the public street ? Why couldn't you have pushed him quietly into a creek ? "

" Ah had a good reason," the young voice said. " Ah couldn't push him inter a crick or tie him t' a rock i' case someone else woulda got blamed."

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The pure and untouchable eyes regarded the sheriff as if the logic was unanswerable.

" From my side of the fence, I'd never have got in the storm if you hadn't headed there . . . You can say I didn't have to follow you, but from my stand, I had to . . . Anyhow, I got there—and twice you saved my life. Now I'm trying to know what I ought to do . . . You killed a man and the law says you ought to die for it. You saved me when you could have died for trying to do it and it don't seem right you should be killed for that. It comes down to this—what do you owe a good man for saving a life, against what you owe him for killing a bad man? Now if you'd tell me why you killed him . . ."

" Ah cain't tell you that."

" Was it because he'd harmed a girl? Your sister or that pretty little bit you've been courting? "

The wild thing did not answer, but crimson, dark as the red of angry dawn, ran up the beautiful cheeks and throat, even staining the suddenly heaving chest.

" So it was! " the sheriff said. " He was always a no-good swine with women! " The boy's attitude remained relaxed except for the change in his breathing, but the dark eyes looking at the sea swam with tears.

" God damn you! " the sheriff said bitterly. " You won't help yourself—why should I try to help you? " But he knew that in similar circumstances he would not have talked.

" You better let me fix that arm o' yours," the boy said.

" Hell! " the sheriff muttered. The young brown hands were gentle with the agony of his arm. When it was splinted, the boy brought him a can of water caught from where a tree limb spilled a trickle of collected rain. " It's mighty salty but Ah set up some more cans t' catch th' rain straight."

" You can't expect me just to take your word for it that you were justified! " the sheriff shouted under the combined stress of emotion and physical agony. " I can't just say, ' I don't have any evidence, but I believe you! ' How'd I feel if you were really lying and if before long I heard you'd killed someone else? "

" Bad, Ah reckon," the boy said.

" Good heavens! You know it's the end for you if I take you back and you won't talk? "

" Ah'd sooner that than go t' gaol! "

The sheriff put his hand on the boy's arm. " Listen, son! I may be all wrong, but I believe you had a reason—if there's ever a reason for killing outside the law! But don't stick to it blind! Gaol is bad. If you went to gaol you'd be an old man when you got out—and gaol makes bad men.

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" The electric chair isn't good either. It's the end of fishing in the creeks when the bees are around till the sun sounds as if it was singing. It's no more spear-fishing at night. No more finding a girl that loves you. No thinking there may be kids of your own some day. No more big sunsets or cokes and sandwiches or playing the juke box. It's a minute that's worse than when we went under the rubbish—because you can't struggle. A minute when everyone under the sky's against you—and it's you who have to die. It's that fine body of yours being carried off, stiff and ugly, and stuck in the ground . . . Tell me! I'll try to see the girl isn't told on! "

" Would you be a-tellin' ? "

The sheriff ran his good hand through his salt-stiffened hair and groaned as he wiped sweat from his face, on which cool rain fell.

" Coast Guard's comin'," the boy said non-committally, listening to a distant sound of engines. He stood up, brown and lovely. " Ah get your way o' seein' it, Sheriff . . . Ah'm goin' t' walk inter th' bushes yonder. Ah don't reckon you's goin' t' shoot me, but if you aim t' there ain't no hard feelin's. If you tell th' Coast Guard Ah'm here, Ah'm goin' t' swim fer it—it'll take 'em some time t' get roun' th' Key. Maybe Ah can hide in th' floatin' wreckage. Maybe Ah can't. If they're goin' t' get me, Ah'm goin' t' sink breathin' water an' Ah reckon Ah can drownd like th' Indians showed me . . . If you don't tell, Ah'll make me a raft an' get t' shore an' get a boat an' get down th' islands . . . Ah'm startin' walkin'."

" God of honest men, show me what I ought to do! " the sheriff prayed. One thing he could not do and that was shoot the boy. But for the rest ? . . . The boy had taken a life. The boy had given a life. The law of men still said that the boy must pay for the life he had taken. And whether he paid by death or by prison, it would kill the eagle thing, the free thing and the gentle thing. He, the sheriff, would have killed the boy. How then would he, the sheriff, stand with God ? He pushed his sweating face against the crook of his good arm, and his hand clenched to a fist.

The beat of engines became a launch lifting bow-waves through the rain. The launch rushed closer and he knew the men in it. They also recognized him. " Lor', Sheriff, how did you get yourse'f here ? " a voice drawled at him.

The sheriff stood up, swaying on his feet. His hurricane-battered face was tranquil, and he knew that when he spoke his own voice would be as drawlingly assured and that he would make the right answer.

* * *

*Virtue is insufficient temptation.*

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

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# A ROMAN HOLIDAY

**Mr. Butterworth found himself staring—his excitement grew**

## by WILLIAM SANSOM

ALL roads lead to Rome, and so did Dudley Butterworth's. Or more properly *Mister* Butterworth's—for as a widower, and fairly friendless, his christian name was now seldom heard. Among the piles of huckaback and beneath the old pneumatic accounts-tube in the draper's where he worked, it was always: "Forward, *Mister* Butterworth." "Your fancy terry-towellings, Mister Butterworth, *please*."

Mr. Butterworth, then, haberdasher of many years standing, was on a visit, a life-long-awaited holiday, to Rome.

For the first days he wandered the streets at random. He found that Rome was not as it had been painted for him by travelogues and posters. It was both more, and less, highly coloured: it had a brightness—or a golden glow—beyond the brightness of posters. He was intrigued by the food: by its plenty and by its price. He noticed certain squalors of the by-streets, but soon in the sunlight forgave them.

The shops interested him—the fabulous displays of Italian window-dressers, in which Art had entered accompanied by figurines of straw and patterns of string: these were a far cry indeed from those reassuring windows, where the one word Quality did all the work, of Sellby's of capital S, South, capital L, London.

He was surprised by the aspect of grass-grown mounds rising and falling so haphazardly about the great stretches of ancient ruin: it looked to him less an ancient city than a new one under construction—but abandoned for want, say, of a licence. He admired, though, much of the fine architecture which was still upright. Finally everything, either for its oddity or for its true beauty, charmed him. He thought: "Poor old London."

From the wide Borghese Gardens to the dark wine shops, from the tawny embankment of the Tiber to the turbulence of the Piazza Colonna he was enchanted. He roamed the streets, and Rome put its hand on his heart.

Then he decided to visit formally some of the sights. Accordingly,

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since he spoke no Italian, he invested in a series of conducted tours. Through this, he met Mrs. Naylor-Eddy.

She took to him—or rather took him over—at once.

Mrs. Naylor-Eddy was a bright white-haired lady of great and kindly energy. Within a brusque assortment of skirts, blouses, cardigans and scarves her old limbs flung themselves about as good as new. Her dried, smiling face was often grey with powder, her lips roughly reddened, and her white hair showed still the traces of a blue rinse: grey, red and blue, she looked a little like a Union Jack left too long in the rain. On her head, on trips, she wore a tightly bound bandanna—and then, pounding about among the ruins, she looked more like a cross between a pirate and an eager, early tennis player.

She quickly discovered that Mr. Butterworth was on holiday alone. Warmly she felt he needed help. "Now you stay by me, Mr.—er? . . . ? Butterworth? *Butterworth*," she boomed, so capably, so unquestionably, using her knowledge of Italian as a polite lever, though the guide came from Camberwell and spoke nearly perfect English. "*You* stay by *me*. Us Britishers'll stick together, eh?" Then she sighed: "Poor old London . . . it'll look a bit sorry after this . . . this . . ." she brandished a gnarled and freckled hand ". . . divinity that is Rome."

Although she was thus a trifle overbearing, Mr. Butterworth was quite pleased to be with her. He was grateful for her company and recognized the good will moving somewhere in her heart. Besides, he was used to overbearing ladies. He had aged with them, and long since outgrown his early resentments.

In fact his first manner towards Mrs. Naylor-Eddy was from habit one of mild and willing deference. He learned that she was a widow, knew Italy but not Rome. Just now she was, she curiously added, getting her sea-legs.

Together, then, they visited the Colosseum, St. Peter's, the Vatican, the baths of Caracalla and throughout the long hot days of a Roman summer much else.

Yet—as the days wore on—Mr. Butterworth grew uneasy. Could it be the heat, he thought? Or his feet? . . . that began to make him short-tempered at the sight of Mrs. Naylor-Eddy. He tried hard to control this. It seemed to be no good. He bought some sandals. No good either. But why? Was this the way to repay kindness? Where were his values? But all along he knew where they were.

The trouble had really begun at their first meeting. "Poor old London," she had said.

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And this, in various ways, had been a refrain on her lips ever since. She never ceased to disparage Britain. Food, weather, soot, habits—all things British went the same way. Britain was damp and stupid and third-rate compared with her divine Italy. Although Mrs. Naylor-Eddy may have looked at times like a tattered Union Jack, she scarcely spoke like one.

Mr. Butterworth found this more and more irritating. Especially as, a few days earlier, he had spoken those very same words—"Poor old London"—to himself. But that was very different from hearing someone else say them aloud. And saying them hour after hour, and louder and on acquaintance louder. Once or twice he started a mild defence—but was scoffed down. Despite himself, he began to loathe Mrs. Naylor-Eddy.

Then one day, after luncheon with her ("Nice juicy steak and a *real* cream ice—wouldn't get that at home, would we?"), he excused himself for the afternoon. He could bear it no longer. He knew the party was off to the Capitol, he decided to return to St. Peter's.

There was something he had liked particularly about St. Peter's. What it was he could not quite remember—or had he ever known? At least he would return to find out.

He walked. He paced slowly up the famous approach and at length stood on the first stones within the magnificent forecourt, the Colonnade.

He stopped. He looked round puzzled. At the same time the feeling of pleasure he had first experienced came back. Whatever produced it was here—not inside the basilica itself.

He faced the grand circle of stone columns. Priests and visitors made a small passing crowd around him—but all were dwarfed by the graven magnificence widely encircling about. Grey stone—and above it a hard blue sky. That might have been all, but above the columns, and above the graceful and precise line of the entablature above them, which cut so firmly against the absolute, the depthless blue—between these there did exist another life.

At intervals, devoutly poised against the sky, stood the stone figures of saints.

These stood in attitudes of various adoration, there was no uniform posture, they had been placed purposefully at erratic angles, some leaned this way, others that, and often it seemed they were about to fly off into the sky itself. They were human figures—yet set static in attitudes of almost inhuman angle.

It was at these now that Mr. Butterworth found himself staring. And that feeling of pleasure, like the mysterious excitement of a memory achingly unperceived, grew stronger.

The statues stood in hard grey stone against the sky, a sky so

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moveless and so near that it might itself have been a mass of blue, sapphirine stone. The saints, hard in their flowing garments, their hands and their feet poised in attitudes almost impossible, twisted their heads and stared aloft with sightless eyes.

"Waxworks?" puzzled Mr. Butterworth, on whom the beauties of such sculpture were largely lost. "But I don't like waxworks."

And then suddenly it flooded across him—he realized it all, and he peered the harder, and a smile not of amusement but of love quivered larger on his lips.

Mr. Butterworth was not a man of unusual sensibility. He was what is called an ordinary man, but with an "ordinary" man's occasional moments of extraordinary vision.

His argument with Mrs. Naylor-Eddy had not been, for instance, one of impassioned patriotism: it had arisen more from an ordinary dislike of listening to the loud voice of self-satisfaction. And now what he saw, in the same way, was no more fanciful for him than the pictures that a man may ordinarily see in the fire.

He saw that the figures were very like the figures in Sellby's advertisements for Ladies' Spring Gowns.

The memory rushed back—he saw with excitement the thin line-drawings, the drapery of each dress drawn in such straight detail, the heads of each model twisted in sightless sweetness, the impossible legs mincing on their long court shoes, the arms angled in attitudes of a delicacy not known.

And the stuffy, musty smells of Sellby's came back to him, and the warm security of soundless carpets, and the mystery too of carpets pillared in rolled bales behind which small dramas of the everyday might be about to occur.

The glint of the brass rule inlaid into his own counter. The sound of the Head Walker, who stole about on quiet feet but always heralded his coming yards away by an unconscious sucking of his teeth—the fiercer when he was intent upon a victim.

And that old pneumatic tube through which, in his earlier days, bills used to be sent in their brass cartridges whirring up to the accounts department. Sometimes messages used to accompany the bills . . . his Molly had been up there in the Accounts . . . he had often dared a note to her . . . a "high-pressure courtship," they had all joked . . .

So, as more seasoned travellers may long for the smells of autumn fire-smoke, or for the dampness of a London fog—Mr. Butterworth was filled with a desire for, and an overwhelming belief in, these intimate smells and sounds and sights that meant home for him.

He stood there, on those stones laid for belief, believing. His exultation was of a simpler kind—but nevertheless it was indeed

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an exultation of the spirit, and thus in its humble way acceptable in that place and by those saintly stone ones poised above who had been its inspiration, and upon whose every other arm his mind now hung a small stitched handbag.

When he got back to the hotel, he found Mrs. Naylor-Eddy waiting. She told him all about her day—and then began to outline excitedly the plans for the morrow.

"I'm afraid I won't be coming tomorrow," said Mr. Butterworth.

"Now come on Mr. B—no slacking!"

"Moreover I'm taking the next train north. Tonight."

Her face hung open. She was truly bewildered.

"You're going *home*?" she piped high with shock.

"I may stay a day in Paris. But only to buy a few things." He added firmly, "Only for that."

"But . . . but . . ." she searched, then pounced, "but you haven't *reserved*, you'll never get a *seat* . . ."

"Men have stood," murmured Mr. Butterworth, "for far, far less."

Back at Sellby's they all congratulated him on his colour. "Bronzed and broke," they laughed. And they prodded him about the "young" beauties of Paris, and more seriously about the ancient beauties of Rome. But of these he seemed to have oddly little to say.

Only when St. Peter's was mentioned did he brighten a little. A smile of memory glinted.

"Ah," he said, "A nice church that. Yes, a really *nice* church."

* * *

## *ALTER EGO*

*I know a little man both ept and ert.*
*An intro? Extro? No, he's just a vert.*
*Sheveled and couth and kempt, pecunious, ane:*
*His image trudes upon the ceptive brain.*

*When life turns sipid and my friend is traught,*
*The spirit soars as I would sist it ought.*
*Chalantly then, like any gainly goof,*
*My digent self is sertive, choate, loof.*

DAVID MCCORD

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# ROYAL ROMANCES

## Goddesse of youth, and lady of the spring

ROBERT HERRICK, *To the Queene*

KING HENRY: Tell me, most fair Katharine, will you have me? Put off your maiden blushes; avouch the thoughts of your heart with the looks of an empress; take me by the hand and say,—Harry of England, I am thine . . . Come, your answer in broken music—for thy voice is music and thy English broken; therefore, queen of all, Katharine, break thy mind to me in broken English,—wilt thou have me?

KATHARINE: Dat is as it sall please de roi mon père.

KING HENRY: Nay, it will please him well, Kate—it shall please him.

KATHARINE: Den it sall also content me.

KING HENRY: Upon that I kiss your hand, and I call you my queen.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Henry V*

## *My Dear Heart . . .*

*I shall always think all you do right, provided that you always love me, and that my distance and the smallness of the service I render you do not take away your affection, which is the only thing in this world in which I take delight, and but for that, I should long ago have been no longer in it. Wherefore I conjure you to write to me oftener, for in six weeks I have only received two letters from you, and to be convinced that I have affection, and wish to serve you, though but little capacity; but small though it be, I have not spared it. Adieu, my dear heart.*

QUEEN HENRIETTA MARIA, *in a letter to Charles I, November* 20, 1642

## *Tudor Rose*

HENRY: Oh, I love England—every meadow and river of England; and you are like her very symbol—like a rose in the morning.

KATHERYN: A briar-rose?

HENRY: A rose without a thorn . . . That's what you are—if any woman can be.

KATHERYN: Poor Harry!

HENRY: Look me in the eyes.

KATHERYN: What do you see?

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HENRY: Yes! . . . A new life, Katheryn.
KATHERYN: A happier life?
HENRY: The green realm of England would make a fair setting for The Rose without a Thorn.
KATHERYN: You can't really mean . . .
HENRY: God wills it! You shall be Queen of England.
KATHERYN: It *was* that! Harry, Harry!
HENRY: Be gentle, be loyal—and love me well! (They kiss) This time there's no mistake.
KATHERYN: You are sure, quite sure? Oh, I hope so!
HENRY: I have not been in hell for nothing. I know the look of heaven, when I catch a glimpse of it.
KATHERYN: You shall be proud of me.

CLIFFORD BAX, *The Rose Without a Thorn*

## *Favour Graced Me*

*When I was fair and young, and favour graced me,*
*Of many was I sought, their mistress for to be;*
*But I did scorn them all, and answered them therefore,*
*"Go, go, go, seek some otherwhere,*
*Importune me no more!"*

*How many weeping eyes I made to pine with woe,*
*How many sighing hearts, I have no skill to show;*
*Yet I the prouder grew, and answered them therefore,*
*"Go, go, go, seek some otherwhere,*
*Importune me no more!"*

QUEEN ELIZABETH I, *Youth and Cupid*

## *Royal Proposal*

VICTORIA: Albert! What are you doing?
ALBERT: I was listening to Ernest, practising. I can just hear him; it is Beethoven.
VICTORIA: Don't listen to Ernest! You must listen to me!
ALBERT: I beg your pardon, Cousin; I was listening. Please don't think I am inattentive.
VICTORIA: (after a long pause) Albert . . . I have something to say to you.
ALBERT: Yes . . . what is it, Cousin?
VICTORIA: In my position it is I who have to say it—unfortunately. Ordinarily it is not what a woman would wish to say herself. She would rather—*he* said it.

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ALBERT: Is there anything you wish me to say—that I can say?
VICTORIA: (tremulously) To hear you say you *can* love me, is all I can hope—yet. If you could say that you already *do* love me, that would be—almost like Heaven.
ALBERT: I do . . . love you, Cousin.
VICTORIA: Enough to marry me?
ALBERT: More than enough to marry you. For people in our position often marry without any love at all.
VICTORIA: I couldn't do that, Albert.
ALBERT: Nor could I—Victoria.
VICTORIA: Then will you marry me?
ALBERT: If it is still your wish—when you know me—I will, very gratefully and humbly, accept this dear hand that you offer me.

LAURENCE HOUSMAN, *Woman Proposes*

## *Royal Wedding*

*How many times, when London bells have rung*
*At Royal weddings in these crowded ways,*
*This air has trembled to the iron tongue :*
*The same Hope stirs as in those yesterdays . . .*

*Only, today, beside the human hope*
*That two young lovers, taking hand in hand,*
*May tread the dark in which we mortals grope*
*The surer for two hearts that understand,*

*Beside that hope, mankind, in its distress,*
*Turns to the Crown today as something fair,*
*Something divinely bright for men to bless,*
*A gleam, a star, to point men from despair :*

*An Order and a Beauty from of old,*
*Set by its Virtue above greed and hate,*
*A loveliness of living crowned with gold,*
*In all life's storm a standard to the State ;*

*To such a Crown all broken spirits turn :*
*And we, who see this young face passing by,*
*See Her as symbol of a Power Eterne,*
*And pray that Heaven bless Her till she die.*

JOHN MASEFIELD, *Lines on the occasion of the Wedding of Her Royal Highness the Princess Elizabeth, November* 20, 1947

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# THE MURDERER

## "Go away," said the prisoner, smiling

## by RAY BRADBURY

MUSIC moved with him in the white halls. He passed an office door: *The Merry Widow Waltz.* Another door: *Afternoon of a Faun.* A third: *Kiss Me Again.* He turned into a cross-corridor: *The Sword Dance* buried him in cymbals, drums, pots, pans, knives, forks, thunder, and tin lightning. All washed away as he hurried through an ante-room where a secretary sat nicely stunned by Beethoven's Fifth. He moved himself before her eyes, like a hand; she didn't see him.

His wrist-radio buzzed.

"Yes?"

"This is Lee, Dad. Don't forget about my allowance."

"Yes, son, yes. I'm busy."

"Just didn't want you to forget, Dad," said the wrist-radio. Tchaikowsky's *Romeo and Juliet* swarmed about the voice and flushed into the long halls.

The psychiatrist moved in the beehive of offices, in the cross-pollination of themes, Stravinsky mating with Bach, Haydn unsuccessfully repulsing Rachmaninoff, Schubert slain by Duke Ellington. He nodded to the humming secretaries and the whistling doctors fresh to their morning work.

At his office he checked a few papers with his stenographer, who sang under her breath, then phoned the police superintendent upstairs.

A few minutes later, a red light blinked, a voice said from the ceiling: "Prisoner delivered to interview chamber Nine."

He unlocked the chamber door, stepped in, heard the door lock behind him.

"Go away," said the prisoner, smiling.

The psychiatrist was shocked by that smile. A very sunny, pleasant, warm thing, a thing that shed bright light upon the room. Dawn among the dark hills. High noon at midnight, that smile. The blue eyes sparkled serenely above that display of self-assured dentistry.

"I'm here to help you," said the psychiatrist, frowning. Some-

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thing was wrong with the room. He had hesitated the moment he entered. He glanced around.

The prisoner laughed. "If you're wondering why it's so quiet in here, I just kicked the radio to death."

Violent, thought the doctor.

The prisoner read this thought, smiled, put out a gentle hand. "No, only to machines that yak-yak-yak."

Bits of the wall-radio's tubes and wires lay on the grey carpeting. Ignoring these, feeling that smile upon him like an idiot heat-lamp, the psychiatrist sat across from his patient in the unusual silence which was like the gathering of a storm.

"You're Mr. Albert Brock, who calls himself The Murderer?"

Brock nodded pleasantly. "Before we start . . ." He moved quietly and quickly to detach the wrist-radio from the doctor's arm. He tucked it in his teeth like a walnut, gritted, heard it crack, handed it back to the appalled psychiatrist as if he had done them both a favour.

"That's better."

The psychiatrist stared at the ruined machine. "You're running up quite a damage bill."

"I don't care," smiled the patient. "As the old song goes: 'Don't Care What Happens to Me!'" He hummed it.

The psychiatrist said: "Shall we start?"

"Fine. The first victim, or one of the first, was my telephone. Murder most foul. I shoved it in the kitchen Insinkerator! Stopped the disposal unit in mid-swallow. Poor thing strangled to death. After that, I shot the television set!"

The psychiatrist said, "Mmm."

"Fired six shots right through the cathode. Made a beautiful tinkling crash, like a dropped chandelier."

"Nice imagery."

"Thanks, I always dreamt of being a writer."

"Suppose you tell me when you first began to hate the telephone."

"It frightened me as a child. Uncle of mine called it the Ghost Machine. Voices without bodies. Scared the living hell out of me. Later in life, I was never comfortable. Seemed to me a phone was an impersonal instrument.

"If it *felt* like it, it let your personality go through its wires. If it didn't *want* to, it just drained your personality away until what slipped through at the other end was some cold fish of a voice, all steel, copper, plastic, no warmth, no reality.

"It's easy to say the wrong things on telephones, the telephone changes your meaning for you. First thing you know, you've made

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an enemy. Then, of course, the telephone's such a *convenient* thing; it just sits there and *demands* that you should phone someone who doesn't want to be rung up at all.

"Friends were always phoning, phoning, phoning me. Hell, I hadn't any time to call my own.

"When it wasn't the telephone it was the television, the radio, the phonograph. When it wasn't the television or the radio or the phonograph it was motion pictures at the corner theatre, motion pictures projected, with commercials on low-lying cumulus clouds. It doesn't rain rain any more, it rains soapsuds.

"When it wasn't High-Fly Cloud advertisements, it was music by Mozzek in every restaurant; music and commercials on the buses I rode to work.

"When it wasn't music, it was inter-office communications, and my horror-chamber of a radio wrist-watch on which my friends and my wife phoned every five minutes. What is there about such amenities that makes them so *temptingly* convenient? The average man thinks, here I am, time on my hands, and there on my wrist is a wrist-telephone, so why not just buzz old Joe up, eh? 'Hullo, hullo!'

"I love my friends, my wife, humanity, very much, but when one minute my wife calls to say, 'Where are you *now*, dear?' and a friend calls and says, 'Got a really good one to tell you. Seems there was a guy—'

"And a stranger calls and cries out, 'This is the Find-Fax Poll. What gum are you chewing at this very *instant*?' Well!"

"How did you feel during the week?"

"The fuse lit. On the edge of the cliff. That same afternoon I did what I did at the office."

"Which was?"

"I poured a paper cup of water into the intercommunications system."

The psychiatrist wrote on his pad.

"And the system shorted?"

"Beautifully! The Fourth of July on wheels! My God, stenographers ran around looking *lost*! What an uproar!"

"Felt better temporarily, eh?"

"Fine! Then I got the idea, at noon, of stamping my wrist-radio to bits on the pavement. A shrill voice was just yelling out of it at me, 'This is People's Poll Number Nine. What did you eat for lunch?' when I kicked the guts out of the wrist-radio!"

"Felt even *better*, eh?"

"It *grew* on me!" Brock rubbed his hands together. "Why

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didn't I start a solitary revolution, deliver man from certain *conveniences*? 'Convenient for whom?' I cried.

"Convenient for friends: 'Hey, Al, thought I'd call you from the locker room out here at Green Hills. Just made a beautiful shot, holed in one! A hole in one, Al! A wonderful day. Having a whisky now. Thought you'd want to know, Al!'

"Convenient for my office so when I'm in the field with my radio-car there's no moment when I'm not in touch.

"In *touch*! *There's* a slimy phrase. Touch, hell. *Gripped*! Pawed, rather. Mauled and massaged and pounded by voices.

"You can't leave your car without checking in: 'Have stopped to visit petrol-station men's room.' 'O.K., Brock, step on it!'

"'Brock, what *took* you so long?' 'Sorry, sir.'

"'Watch it next time, Brock.' '*Yes*, sir!'

"So, do you know what I did, doctor? I bought a quart of French chocolate ice-cream and spooned it into the car radio-transmitter."

"Was there any *special* reason for selecting French chocolate ice-cream to spoon into the broadcasting unit?"

Brock thought about it and smiled. "It's my favourite flavour."

"Oh," said the doctor.

"I thought, hell, what's good enough for me is good enough for the radio-transmitter."

"What made you think of spooning *ice-cream* into the radio?"

"It was a hot day."

The doctor paused.

"And what happened next?"

"Silence happened next. Lord, it was *beautiful*! That car radio cackling all day, Brock go here, Brock go there, Brock check in, Brock check out; O.K., Brock, lunch-time, Brock; lunch over, Brock, *Brock*, Brock.

"Well, that silence was like putting ice-cream in my ears."

"You seem to like ice-cream a lot."

"I just rode around feeling the silence. It's a big bolt of the nicest, softest flannel ever made. Silence. A whole hour of it. I just sat in my car, smiling, feeling that flannel with my ears. I felt *drunk* with Freedom!"

"Go on."

"Then I got the idea of the portable diathermy machine. I rented one, took it on the bus going home to the suburbs that night. There sat all the tired workers with their wrist-radios, talking to their wives, saying, 'Now I'm passing the bank, now I'm at the stores, here I am just getting out, now I'm turning the corner.'

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One husband cursing, 'Well, get *out* of that bar, damn it, and get back and get dinner started, I'm nearly home!' And the transit-system radio playing *Tales from the Vienna Woods*, a canary singing words about a first-rate wheat cereal.

"Then—I switched on my diathermy machine! Static! Interference! All wives cut off from husbands grousing about a hard day at the office. All husbands cut off from wives who had just seen their children break a window! The *Vienna Woods* chopped down, the canary mangled!

"*Silence*! A terrible, unexpected silence. The bus passengers faced with having to converse with each other. Panic! Sheer, animal panic!"

"The police seized you?"

"The bus *had* to stop. After all, the music *was* being scrambled, husbands and wives *were* out of touch with reality. Pandemonium, riot, and chaos. Squirrels chattering in cages! A trouble unit arrived, triangulated on me instantly, had me reprimanded, fined, and home, minus my diathermy machine, in next to no time."

"Mr. Brock, may I suggest that so far your whole pattern here is not very—practical? If you didn't like transit radios or office radios or car-business radios, why didn't you join a fraternity of radio-haters, start petitions, get legal and constitutional rulings? After all, this *is* a democracy."

"And I," said Brock, "am that thing best called a minority. I *did* join fraternities, picket, pass petitions, take it to court. Year after year I protested. Everyone laughed. Everyone else *loved* bus radios and commercials. *I* was out of step."

"Then you should have taken it like a good soldier, don't you think? The majority rules."

"But they went too far. If a little music and 'keeping in touch' was charming, they imagined a whole lot would be ten times as charming. I went *wild*!

"I got home to find my wife hysterical. Why? Because she had been completely out of touch with me for half a day. Remember, I did a dance on my wrist-radio? Well, that night, I laid plans to murder my house."

"Are you *sure* that's how you want me to write it down?"

"That's semantically accurate. Kill it dead. It's one of those talking, singing, humming, weather-reporting, poetry-reading, novel-reciting, jingle-jangling, rockabye-crooning-when-you-go-to-bed houses. A house that screams opera at you in the bath and teaches you Spanish in your sleep.

"One of those blathering caves where all kinds of electronic Oracles make you feel a trifle larger than a thimble, with stoves that

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say, ' I'm apricot pie, and I'm *done*,' or ' I'm prime roast beef; so *baste* me ! ' and other nursery gibberish like that. With beds that rock you to sleep and *shake* you awake.

" A house that *barely* tolerates humans, I tell you. A front door that barks: ' You've mud on your feet, sir ! ' And an electronic vacuum-hound that snuffles around after you from room to room inhaling every finger-nail or ash you drop. Blue hell, *I* say, hell ! "

" Quietly," suggested the psychiatrist.

" Remember that Gilbert and Sullivan song ? Something about, I've got them on my list—they'd none of them be missed. All night I listed grievances. Next morning early I bought a pistol.

" I *purposely* muddied my feet. I stood at our front door. The front door shrilled, ' Dirty feet, muddy feet ! Wipe your feet ! please be *neat* ! ' I shot the damn thing in its keyhole !

" I ran to the kitchen where the stove was just whining, ' Turn me *over* ! ' In the middle of a mechanical omelette, I did the stove to death. Oh, how it sizzled and screamed, ' I'm *shorted* ! ' Then the telephone rang like a spoiled brat. I shoved it down the Insinkerator. I must state here and now I have *nothing* whatever against the Insinkerator, it was an innocent bystander.

" I feel sorry for it now, a practical device indeed, which never said a word, purred like a sleepy lion most of the time, and digested our left-overs. I'll have it restored.

" Then I went in and shot the television set, that insidious beast, that Medusa, which freezes a billion people to stone every night, staring fixedly, that Siren which called and sang and promised so much and gave, after all, so little, but myself always going back, going back, hoping and waiting until—bang !

" Like a flabbergasted turkey, gobbling, my wife whooped out of the front door. The police came. Here I *am* ! "

He sat back, happily, and lit a cigarette.

" Mr. Brock did you realize, in committing these crimes, that the wrist-radio, the broadcasting transmitter, the phone, the bus-radio, the office inter-comms, all were rented, or were someone else's property ? "

" I would do it all over again, so help me God ! "

The psychiatrist sat there in the sunshine of that beatific smile.

" You don't want any further help from the Office of Mental Health ? You're ready to take the consequences ? "

" This is only the beginning," said Mr. Brock. " I'm the vanguard of the great public which is tired of noise and being taken advantage of and pushed around and yelled at; every moment music, every moment in touch with some voice somewhere, do this,

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do that, quick, quick, now here, now there. You'll *see*. The revolt begins. My name will go down in history!"

"Mmm." The psychiatrist seemed to be thinking.

"It'll take time, of course. It was all so enchanting, at first. The very *idea* of these things, the practical uses, was wonderful. They were almost toys, to be played with, but the people got too involved, went too far, and got wrapped up in a pattern of social behaviour and couldn't get out, couldn't admit they were *in*, even. So they rationalized their nerves as something else, 'Our modern age,' they said.

"'Conditions,' they said. 'Highly-strung,' they said. But mark my words, the seed has been sown. I got world-wide coverage on TV, radio, films; *there's* irony for you. That was five days ago. A billion people know about me. Check your financial columns. Any day now, it may be today, watch for a sudden spurt, a rise in sales for French chocolate ice-cream!"

"I see," said the psychiatrist.

"Can I go back to my nice, private cell now, where I can be alone and quiet for six months?"

"Yes," said the psychiatrist, quietly.

"Don't worry about me," said Mr. Brock, rising. "I'm just going to sit around for a long time stuffing that nice soft bolt of quiet material in both ears."

"Mmm," said the psychiatrist, going to the door.

"Cheers," said Mr. Brock.

"Yes," said the psychiatrist.

He pressed a code signal on a hidden button, the door opened, he stepped out, the door shut and locked. Alone, he moved in the offices and corridors.

The first twenty yards of his walk were accompanied by *Tambourin Chinois*. Then it was *Tzigane*, Bach's *Passacaglia and Fugue* in something Minor, *Tiger Rag*, *Love is like a Cigarette*. He took his broken wrist-radio from his pocket like a dead praying mantis. He turned in at his office.

A bell sounded; a voice came out of the ceiling, "Doctor?"

"Just finished with Brock," said the psychiatrist.

"Diagnosis?"

"Seems completely disorientated, but convivial. Refuses to accept the simplest realities of his environment and work *with* them."

"Prognosis?"

"Indefinite. Left him enjoying a piece of invisible material."

Three phones rang. A duplicate wrist-radio in his desk-drawer buzzed like a wounded grasshopper. The inter-comm flashed a pink

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light and click-clicked. Three phones rang. The drawer buzzed. Music blew in through the open door.

The psychiatrist, humming quietly, fitted the new wrist-radio to his wrist, flipped the inter-comm, talked a moment; picked up one telephone, talked; picked up another telephone, talked; picked up the third telephone, talked; touched the wrist-radio button, talked calmly and quietly, his face cool and serene, in the middle of the music and the lights flashing, the two phones ringing again, and his hands moving, and his wrist-radio buzzing, and the inter-comms talking and voices speaking from the ceiling.

And he went on, quietly, this way, through the remainder of a cool, air-conditioned and long afternoon; telephone, wrist-radio, inter-comm, telephone, wrist-radio, inter-comm, telephone, wrist-radio, inter-comm, telephone, wrist-radio, inter-comm, telephone, wrist-radio; inter-comm, telephone, wrist-radio . . .

* * *

## *A MERE NOVELTY*

Here will I mention a thing, . . . but frivolous to divers readers . . . a mere novelty . . .

These Italian fannes both men and women of the country doe carry to coole themselves withall in the time of heate, by the often fanning of their faces. Most of them are very elegant and pretty things. For whereas the fanne consisteth of a painted peece of paper and a little wooden handle; the paper which is fastened into the top is on both sides most curiously adorned with excellent pictures of amorous things tending to dalliance, having some witty Italian verses or fine emblemes written under them.

Many doe carry other fine things of a far greater price, that will cost at least a ducat, which they commonly call in the Italian tongue *umbrellàes*, that is, things that minister shadow unto them for shelter against the scorching heate of the Sunne. These are made of leather something answerable to the form of a little canopy, and hooped in the inside with divers little wooden hoops that extend the umbrella in a pretty large compasse. They are used especially by horsemen, who carry them in their hands when they ride, fastening the end of the handle upon one of their thighes, and they impart so long a shadow unto them, that it keepeth the heate of the sunne from their bodies.

THOMAS CORYAT, *Observations of Cremona*, 1611

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# MIND OF A CHILD

**All of us have weaknesses—
his was raspberry jam**

## by ROLAND PERTWEE

BECAUSE Rodney was worried, it was not a world of his own invention and imagination that morning, but a plain, straightforward garden, with Mr. Burt, the odd-job man, heaping up weeds to make a bonfire in the scratchy bit of ground behind the macrocarpa hedge where the potting-shed stood and rubbish lay about.

Mr. Burt was piling the weeds on a faggot of wood with crumpled paper under it and had driven a hole with the handle of his rake from the top of the heap to the bottom so that the fire would draw when he lighted it.

He had waited for an offhouse wind to blow the smoke over the broken back fence and across the ditch that, in summer, was full of brambles and stinging nettles and, in winter, had broken crockery, rusty old pots and cans, and half an iron bedstead in it. The smoke would then become a drift of paler blue melting into the blue of the weald which, to Rodney, was another world where only older boys dared to venture without taking their parents along.

Near the foot of the weed pile was the body of a mole, carelessly tossed aside in the jaws of the trap that had caught him while busily tunnelling in pursuit of worms. If Rodney had not been worried, he would have thought the mole looked like a bear, a very long way off.

Very soon Nanny would call him in for breakfast. That was what he was worried about, for breakfast would prove whether or not he had won his battle against the raspberry jam. The day before he had denounced Markham's Raspberry Jam as horrible and unfit to eat and had asked why it must be given to him, when they knew perfectly well that it was Dean's Fulfrute Raspberry Jam that he liked.

To this his mother had replied: "Don't be silly, darling, there's no difference whatever between them."

"There is," he persisted, "and Markham's is beastly."

His father, over the top of a morning paper, told him to put a sock in it, and Nanny coldly remarked that he was "far too fanciful and fastidious," because she was just as fond of fault-finding words as was Rodney of Dean's Fulfrute Raspberry Jam.

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But in spite of all this Rodney stuck to his guns and went jamless from the table, feeling that he had been very hardly done by.

After he had gone, his mother sighed: "I do wish he wasn't quite so imaginative. He can make himself believe anything. The other day he scraped up a lot of dust and cinders and told me it was macaroon. When I said it didn't look very nice he put a handful in his mouth and said it was lovely. The poor child was spitting out mud for ages after and not minding a bit."

His father grinned: "'There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.' But how does he know one jam from another —he can't read?"

"The labels are different."

And that gave his father an idea.

Rodney did not hurry when Nanny called. He made the kind of noise which means "I'm coming" and crawled through the macrocarpa hedge to the shrubbery mound on the other side. Wind-blown petals from a wild cherry had made the ground look like the steps of the church after that wedding at which he was a page. Beyond the shrubbery was a grass patch silvery with dew, and Rodney dragged his feet through it, leaving behind a sort of wheel track and turning his dull, black shoes into shiny patent leather.

At the lily-pond, which was about twice the size of an ordinary bath, he stopped to watch a water-spider and looked down at a paper boat he had made. It had filled in a shower of rain and sunk to the bottom, where it unfolded and became again the piece of paper that had wrapped up a bottle of magnesia Mummy had bought when his inside was "sluggish."

"Come *along*, Rodney," Nanny repeated, in a voice with spurs on it.

Rodney looked anxiously towards the open French windows of the dining-room as Tibby dropped from the bough of an apple tree and strolled through them. Tibby always sat on that bough before breakfast, and came in for a saucer of milk at breakfast-time. Afterwards she stretched herself on the hearth-rug while Daddy sat in the armchair reading his paper until the car came to take him to the station.

It was silly to make people angry by keeping them waiting, so Rodney embarked on the final stage of his journey, pausing for a moment to wonder when Mr. Burt had criss-cross raked his sand-pit and turned it from a desert into a great cottage-pie.

Between the sand-pit and the house was a lawn where lots and lots of daisies were taking their first and last look at the sun, because, later in the day, Mr. Burt was going to cut their heads off. Rodney knew that daisies did not mind having their heads cut off, because

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they have thousands of brothers and sisters and cousins hiding just below the surface, ready to pop up and show their faces, when the mower has gone by.

Rodney slouched into the dining-room with his hands in the pockets of his shorts and his mouth shaped as it would have been if he was whistling, which was something he couldn't do.

Mummy and Daddy were at the table, but Nanny stood behind his chair, waiting to push it in when he had wriggled onto it. Between the fork and spoon of his place was a new mat on which Nanny had sewn words. Rodney had never before had a mat with words on it and it made him feel important.

Mummy said: "There's a lucky boy, with a nice new mat!"

Something in the way she said it aroused his suspicions.

"What do the words say?" he asked.

Mummy said nothing, but Nanny came out with the answer like a slap. "*Don't Be Dainty* is what they say," she replied, "and what you don't want to be."

Rodney thought: They haven't forgotten or forgiven. They are going to start it all over again.

He felt the red coming into his cheeks and was just going to grab the mat and fling it on the floor, when he saw something which could only mean that the enemy had struck their colours.

It was a jam pot bearing the unmistakable label of Dean's Fulfrute Raspberry Jam.

A boy with less sense would have openly gloated at his victory, but Rodney was too sensible to do that. He ate his cereal and milk with a great deal of sploshing and smacking of lips. He was not offended when his father said:

"That's a pretty noise you're making."

He saw that, having given way to him over something really important, they would more or less have to take it out of him in other ways. While hurrying through his sausage, he decided that he had never been fonder of everybody.

Grown-ups, even like Nanny, were all right if you knew how to manage them; if you put your foot down and kept it down until they gave in. But he couldn't help feeling a tiny bit awkward when the sausage plate was taken away and the time had come to help himself to raspberry jam.

He expected somebody to say something, but nobody did. Mummy was reading a letter for the second time and Daddy was behind his newspaper. Nanny nibbled a piece of toast in the front of her mouth with her eyes closed, which was supposed to mean that she had loftier things to think about than mere food.

As nobody was looking, he spooned out a huge helping and set

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about it like nobody's business. When nothing was left but a crimson blotch on the plate, Daddy lowered his paper and said :

" That seemed to go down all right."

Rodney swallowed the last mouthful and nodded. " It did. It was gallopshus," which was the highest praise in his vocabulary.

" Better than what you had yesterday, old man ? "

" As different as different. That was the horriblest jam in the world."

" Was it ? " said Daddy, but before he could go on, Mummy said : " I don't think I would, Billy."

Nanny said : " If you want to know, Rodney, it's Markham's you've just been eating, only we put it in a Dean's pot to take you in."

Rodney did not say anything, because there was a lump in his throat which choked the words. Instead, he snatched up the *Don't Be Dainty* mat, flung it across the table and fled from the room.

His mother pushed her chair back and half rose, but his father, who had started the thing and felt they must see it through, said : " No, not yet, darling. Better let him work it out for himself."

Nanny said : " It will do him all the good in the world, that's my opinion."

But his mother wasn't so sure. " Will it ? I don't think parents ought to deceive their children."

Nanny bridled. " He deceives himself often enough. It's high time he learned that two can play at the same game." Nodding with an air of great wisdom, she folded her napkin and went upstairs to tidy the nursery.

Rodney's mother, feeling most unhappy, stacked the breakfast things on a tray and carried them from the room, while his father moved to the armchair to smoke a pipe and finish reading his paper, with Tibby on the hearth-rug at his feet.

While this was happening, Rodney kept in sight, waiting for somebody to come out and be sorry. But although he gave them heaps of time to relent, nobody came.

When he saw his mother going out with the tray the last hope vanished. That was a terrible moment because it meant that now he must fight the world alone.

In the few minutes left to him, his father was reading an article entitled *Mind of a Child*, in which the writer claimed that, since a child's mind knows no boundaries in space or time and will as readily accept a miracle as the most commonplace occurrence, it travels through a world of make-believe as fluid and untrammelled as a dream.

He was digesting this point when Rodney came to the French windows and said : " I'm running away."

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In the voice of somebody who isn't really listening, his father replied: "Tell me about it presently, old man."

"There isn't going to be a presently because I'm going now."

"Yes, yes, but I've only five minutes to finish this thing so don't chatter—there's a good chap."

Such indifference was almost more than Rodney could bear, and his voice wobbled when he said: "You'll be sorry when I've gone."

"Um-um!"

"And you'll never see me again."

He waited, but the only sound was a rustle from the newspaper.

The die was cast. Rodney sucked in a deep breath and turned towards a vast, empty world with nothing but his own resource and imagination to guide him through it.

Trudging across endless green plains, Rodney lost all count of time, and when he turned for a final look at his old home, it was hidden by a mist, which may have been tears. His throat was dry, and knowing that there was a desert to cross before he reached the sea, he threw himself down on his face and licked dew from the grasses. It was magic dew which made little things big and taught you how to talk to them without knowing that you hadn't been able to before.

An ant was coming towards him carrying an egg in her mouth, and fearing that he might be in her way, he asked:

"Where are you taking it?"

The ant put down the egg between her front legs and bowed.

"Nowhere in particular," she replied cautiously, for you never knew what a stranger might be getting at. "Why? Did you want an egg?"

Rodney shook his head.

"No, thank you. I've just had breakfast."

The ant said: "Don't imagine I was going to offer you this one. It's going to be my little son, you see." She stopped and looked puzzled about something. "Breakfast? Did you say breakfast? Where did you get breakfast in these parts?"

"At The Chestnuts, Fernside Road, where I used to live."

"Well, well!" said the astonished ant. "That must be a thousand miles away!"

"More," said Rodney.

The ant shook her polished head. "I went there once, but I never will again. I went into the larder and got stuck in some horrible stuff called Markham's Raspberry Jam."

Rodney cried out in excitement, "But that's why I ran away!"

And the whole world was a happier place because someone thought the same as he did.

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"Quite right, too. Leaving stuff like that about isn't safe," said the ant. "Well, I must be getting along or I won't be there in time."

"Where?"

"Nowhere in particular," she repeated, and, picking up her egg, vanished into a mighty forest of grass which became quite little again when Rodney got up to continue his journey.

On the evening of the millionth day, he reached the Great Sarah Desert (which nobody could say properly except himself). The wind had blown a criss-cross pattern on the sand which reminded him of what Mr. Burt used to do to his sand-pit with a rake. His father, who had fought with the Eighth Army, had often told him of the terrible heat of the midday sun in the desert, and profiting by this knowledge, Rodney resolved to cross as much of it as he could by night.

It wasn't a very nice thing to have to do without even a vacuum pistol to defend himself with against desert Goums, and the wild beasts who prowled through the darkness in search of prey, but that was something that couldn't be helped. And it wasn't a very nice walk either because both sides of the track were littered with picked bones, white and staring in the moonlight.

Sometimes little things wriggled away or sprang up at his feet and vanished into the night and more than once he heard the deep roar of a lion, which sounded like the noise made by Bowser, the bull terrier, who belonged to their nearest neighbour.

About midnight a great wind rose, and if he had not pulled out his shirt-tails and twisted them over his head, Rodney would have been suffocated by the screaming, whirling sand.

For hours and hours he crouched miserably with his head between his knees, and when the wind had blown itself out and he had shaken the sand from his hair and ears, it was only to make the dreadful discovery that he had lost his way.

"What am I going to do?" he wailed, and became aware, in his tummy, of a funny sort of pulling sensation which, although he did not recognize it, was the homing instinct.

As he stood undecided whether to yield to the pull or go in the opposite direction, he heard a buzzing which got nearer and louder, and all of a sudden became a helicopter with a man in it who had a great big wavy moustache on his face.

The man was just as pleased to see Rodney as was Rodney to see him, and when he turned out to be none other than the funny flying uncle from Children's Hour who always said, "Whizzo! Prang! I rather go for that!" and "Bang-on," Rodney couldn't clamber into the helicopter fast enough.

He had never flown before and was almost sick with excitement,

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but instead of enjoying every second of this new and wonderful experience, he fell asleep and woke up to find that the man and the helicopter had gone and that he was left a day's march from the sea.

As things turned out, he was a great deal less than a day's march, for he fell in with his friend, Hopalong Cassidy, who gave him a lift on the front of a Mexican saddle and told him some interesting facts about apple-pie and cattle-rustling. Before dropping Rodney off at the submarine base he rounded up some bad men and handed them over to the sheriff.

From the very first Rodney had meant to cross the ocean in a submarine, and his disappointment was keen when its commander, looking thoroughly ashamed of himself, said: "It's no good, I'm afraid, because I've dropped the key in the water."

"But what a strordinary thing!" said Rodney. "I dropped mine, too."

The commander shook his head. "That's always happening to things you have to wind," he said. "One ought really to tie the key on with a piece of string, but one forgets. I did try leaving it in the hole after winding up the spring, but that upset the steering and the beastly submarine went round and round in circles."

Rodney said: "It's a dreadful pity, because I'm running away from home."

The commander nodded. "Quite right, too, and I wish I could help you, but I don't know what to suggest unless, by any chance, you happen to know a genie."

"But I know heaps!" Rodney cried. "But we'd have to rub a lamp to get one of them." The commander agreed that that was the difficulty, then remembered that he had picked up a philosopher's stone on Bognor beach. "I never have rubbed it," he said, "but there's no harm in trying."

Three seconds later the genie of the stone was respectfully bowing before them. When told what was wanted, he pulled his beard and said:

"Submarines are awfully difficult, O my masters, but I might be able to manage a galleon or a privateer if that would do."

"Anything I could sail away in would do," said Rodney.

So the genie uttered some very secret words and made a pass with his hands and up from the bottom of the ocean floated a piece of paper, with a chemist's name on it, which folded itself into a boat that grew and changed shape and became a great sailing-ship, bucketing through the Spanish Main, with Rodney scuttling up the rigging and Long John Silver, a knife in his mouth, coming, hand-over-hand, in pursuit.

When breathless and panic-stricken, Rodney reached the crow's

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nest and could go no further, he heard the one-legged terror chuckling the dreadful words :

" Come you down, Jim Hawkins, so as I can slit your weasel."

" But I'm not Jim Hawkins, sir," he sobbed. " I'm Rodney Farrer who ran away from home and I wish I hadn't."

" Rodney or Jim, it's all one to me," croaked Silver and sharpened the blade of his wicked knife on the mainmast.

At that moment, when all appeared lost, Rodney saw a distant shore, and waiting for the ship to roll to starboard, he uttered a defiant cry and plunged downwards into a shark-infested sea.

The sharks' evil eyes had seen him coming, but they were not to know that Rodney was the fastest swimmer in the world. Even though they strained every nerve to overtake and devour him, he outstripped them all and scrambled up the rocky foreshore, leaving behind him, on the surface of the ocean, a fizzling white line like soda-water or the wake of that motor boat which had rushed in between the two piers at Brighton when he had been taken there for a treat.

Thankful to be on dry land again, Rodney turned his back on the sea and saw at his feet a ghostly track leading over the prairie to the mountain. Comforted by the knowledge that some other traveller had passed that way, he followed it to the foothills, which were clothed in a dense forest of flowering trees and shrubs.

He knew instinctively how to find his way through that forest and, before long, was climbing out of the undergrowth into the snows that mantled the mountain top. Here he stopped, undecided whether to descend the other side and force a way through the dark tree belt on the lower slope, or to stay among the snows and build an igloo.

A distant spiral of rising smoke persuaded him to go on and after an exciting and perilous slither on his behind, which made the hole in the seat of his shorts bigger than ever, he struggled through the face-slashing tree belt and came out on the far side.

By now he had practically reached the end of the world and was confronted by the most stirring sight he had seen in all his travels, for only a little distance away, there was a volcano in full eruption. Flames and smoke belched from its crater in a most terrifying fashion and, from a picture he had seen in the newspaper only a week before, Rodney knew that at any moment a stream of burning lava would pour down the steep sides and overwhelm everything that lay in its path.

With such a prospect, he prudently decided to stay where he was until the eruption was over, when he saw, lying under the lee of the volcano where the lava would most certainly flow, a big black bear whose hind legs were caught in a steel trap.

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With more courage than sense, Rodney hastened to the spot, resolved at any risk to set him free.

The bear had already given himself up for lost, but even with the chance of rescue at hand, he was more concerned about other people's danger than his own.

"Stop where you are!" he growled warningly. "There's no point in both of us being done for."

"But I may be able to open the trap before the lava gets to you," Rodney gasped.

"I'm not thinking of the lava," said Bear crossly. "I'm thinking of you."

"But I'll be all right if I'm quick."

"Better not count on that," said Bear. "When he's in a trap a dog will bite even his own master, and wild creatures are much more spiteful, bears worst of all."

"I can't help that, I'm going to try," Rodney sobbed.

"You'll be sorry if you do. Even though I don't want to, I'm certain to give you a biff, and I'm the most terrible biffer once I start biffing."

At that moment the peak of the volcano split wide open and they saw a writhing sea of flame within. Careless of the consequences, Rodney flung himself down and grasped the spring of the trap in both hands. For a second it would not budge; then, very slowly, the jaws fell apart and Bear, biffing in every direction, rolled to safety.

Rodney wasted no time in following his lead, and, one good turn deserving another, Bear picked him up in his arms and galumphed him out of harm's way.

For a long while they sat breathlessly watching the volcano, consumed by its own fires, wither into ash.

At last Bear spoke. "I'm sure I'm very grateful," he said. "If you hadn't turned up when you did, I would have been a goner. How do you happen to be in these parts?"

Rodney found it hard to explain why he had left home, for home seemed such a dreadfully long way off and that funny tug-tug feeling had started in his tummy again. So instead of giving an answer, he asked how Bear had got himself caught in the trap.

Bear did not reply at once, but after a certain amount of rumblings, he said: "It was my own silly fault. I should never have left the jungle where I live," and he nodded towards a valley, tangled with undergrowth, which lay between them and the open country beyond. "Down there I had everything a bear could want and half an iron bedstead thrown in. Having a sweet tooth and not knowing when I was well off caused all the trouble. If I'd stuck to honey from the wild bees it would never have happened, but I

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must go poking about in rubbish heaps for jam pots to lick out."

"Jam pots!" Rodney repeated excitedly.

Bear nodded. "All of us have our weaknesses, and mine is raspberry jam."

Rodney sucked in a deep breath and said: "Dean's Fulfrute Raspberry Jam?"

"Any raspberry jam—they're all alike."

"Let me tell you they're *not*," said Rodney emphatically.

Bear said: "Don't let's have a row about it, but they are."

"*They are not*," Rodney repeated, and told Bear exactly what had happened at the breakfast table.

"But my poor silly child," said Bear, "don't you see, that if you couldn't tell one from the other, it proves that they are just the same?"

Put like that, Rodney couldn't help seeing, and as that meant that he had run away from home for nothing, he covered his face with his hands and wept.

Bear said: "Come, come! If that's how you feel, why not swallow your pride and go back?"

"I don't—expect they'd—know me."

"Is it so long ago since you left them?"

"Years, and years, and years."

Bear said: "Even so I'd give it a run if I were you."

Rodney's father folded the newspaper and looked at his watch. The car to take him to the station was almost due. That article about the mind of a child was probably a lot of nonsense, he thought, though there might be something in it.

He knocked out his pipe in an ashtray and put it on the mantelpiece. Turning to leave the room, he saw his small son leaning against the open French window where, presumably, he had been standing for the last five minutes. Yet there was about the boy an oddly battered look, as if he had come from some far corner of the earth. Not wanting to revive the trouble about the raspberry jam, his father smiled and gave Rodney a friendly: "Hullo, old fellow!"

Rodney's eyes travelled slowly round the room, taking in and marking each familiar object and detail. Then, rather huskily, he said:

"I see you've still got the same old cat."

* * *

*For a man to pretend to understand women is bad manners; for him really to understand them is bad morals.*

HENRY JAMES

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★*Modern magic in an ancient city : the eminent American brain specialist tells a story—more fantastic than fiction—from his days as a young doctor in China before the first World War, when he fought superstition with electrodes, and when his own life hung on his patient's recovery.*

# PATIENT IN PEKING

## by WILLIAM SHARPE

ONE morning during the latter part of April I was performing a gall-bladder operation on an obese white woman in Dr. John A. Snell's missionary hospital in Soochow and having trouble closing the abdominal incision. In the middle of my problem a Chinese gentleman in flowing yellow robes came to the door of the operating-room and said I should go to Peking immediately, by order of the " Emperor of China."

The " Emperor " was Yüan Shih-k'ai, the first President of China following the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty the year before. I interrupted the operation long enough to ask the purpose of this summons, and I was told only that a professional consultation was requested—and quickly. I muttered, " All right," and tried to continue. But with something like this hanging over me I had more trouble than ever in trying to close up the fat woman.

One hour later, however, a special train was rushing me back to Shanghai.

After receiving permission from the dean of the medical faculty for an absence of one month, I boarded a boat, specially chartered, with nothing in my hand but a small suitcase of surgical instruments. Two days later, a special train was rushing me from the port of Tsingtao to Tsinan. I stayed overnight, moved on to Tientsin, and then to nearby Peking—and still no one had told me who the patient was or the character of the malady.

A Captain Tsai Tin-kan—the " Admiral " of the one-ship Chinese navy—met me at the station and had dinner in my suite at the Hôtel des Wagons-Lits. He told me in strictest confidence the reason for my journey.

Yüan Tuen-tai, the eldest son of the President, had fallen from his horse nine weeks before. When he regained consciousness it was discovered that his left side, including the left arm and left leg, was

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completely paralyzed. This paralysis had continued up to the present. As this son, thirty-seven years old, was unusually capable and trained to succeed his father as " President," his recovery was essential to his father's hopes and plans.

President Eliot of Harvard, who was visiting Peking at this time, had told the United States Minister about my neuro-surgical training under Dr. Cushing at Hopkins, and the Minister in turn had told the Chinese Foreign Minister. Thus my name had reached President Yüan Shih-k'ai. Since the patient's paralysis had not improved despite the attentions of nine attending physicians, the President hoped that I might be able to help him. Captain Tsai said, however, that absolute secrecy was necessary, because the President did not wish the Chinese people to know of the condition of his eldest son and heir. The patient, he added, was at the royal provincial residence.

The following morning at ten o'clock I was presented informally to the President, a stout and rugged general of over seventy years. Through the interpreter, Captain Tsai, he urged me to do everything possible for his son and to send word back as soon as I had a definite opinion about the case and treatment of the condition.

Late the next afternoon I arrived at the station of Changte-Fu and stepped into an open carriage drawn by four Manchurian ponies. Off we went to the ancestral home of the patient. As we rode along I saw several camel caravans slowly approaching the city after long treks from somewhere beyond the hills.

Finally we passed through the gate of a thick sandstone wall over ten feet high which surrounded sixteen square miles of estate. As we rode over drive-ways which wound through trees and gardens, lakes and arches, and numerous one-storey buildings, with soldiers strolling about for protection of the family (kidnapping being almost an honourable profession in China), I gaped at the splendour—especially after seeing the hovels and squalor of the nearby city.

My own living-quarters consisted of four rooms in a one-storey Chinese tea-house, alongside a lake of ducks and swans, with numerous birds singing in the trees along the bank. Here there was swimming—and more trees and outdoor life than I had yet seen in China.

That evening I talked with the attending physicians. Seven of them were Chinese, two others were foreign medical missionaries—one German and one French. The Chinese doctor in charge and the two foreign doctors were in their sixties. All three spoke perfect English. They said the patient had suffered a broken neck when he fell and, " with the exception of complete paralysis of left arm and left leg, he is perfectly normal, mentally and physically."

I was unable to confirm their diagnosis that evening because no

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examination was permitted by the mother—a potent force within the household. She was the first of eight wives of the President, and the patient was her only son. She was mistress of the royal residence by virtue of the fact that her son was next in line.

The following morning, in the presence of the mother, of the sons of the other wives, several soldiers, a score of servants, and the group of doctors, I examined the patient as best I could.

He was perfectly conscious and spoke excellent English and German. He had no complaints except a " heaviness " in the head, some stiffness of the neck, and, of course, his inability to move his left arm and left leg.

The positive findings that impressed me were a slight weakness of muscular action on the lower left side of the face and increased pressure within the skull as disclosed by the ophthalmoscope. The signs of pressure were more marked in the right eye than in the left, and sensation to light touch and pinprick was diminished over the entire left side of the body.

Although the corps of doctors had agreed it was a spinal cord injury, I was convinced it was higher up—a lesion of the right side of the brain—and that the spinal cord was not involved.

I requested another examination that afternoon. The foregoing data was confirmed, but this time I demonstrated the findings to my colleagues after the room had been cleared of people—all except the mother. Then, with the mother abstaining, we retired to a room for further discussion. That was when the real fight began.

For ten weeks their diagnosis had been " a cervical spinal-cord lesion," and that was what they had written the President several times. To change the diagnosis now would cause them to lose face. So we harangued.

As we discussed the neurological condition, I soon realized that the Chinese doctors had no conception whatever of the central nervous system, and the two foreign doctors had been so long in China that they had forgotten whatever neurology they had learned.

I went back to tutoring. With blackboard and chalk, I endeavoured to explain the case. I showed how the spinal cord was not involved and how the lesion most likely was a hæmorrhage compressing the right side of the brain in the upper temporo-parietal area. I proceeded to prove this by the left facial paralysis and the other intracranial signs. Finally I said flatly that the patient should be removed to the hospital with the best facilities for a cranial operation.

This recommendation was a bombshell, not only to my colleagues but to the mother, who absolutely refused to permit her son to leave

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the bedroom, let alone go to a hospital. But since I had promised to tell the President of my findings, we finally agreed on the following telegram to the President: "We, the undersigned doctors, have decided the illness of your son is due, *in addition to the spinal-cord injury*, to a hæmorrhagic lesion compressing the right side of the brain, and he should be transported to the hospital in Tientsin for possible operation."

Only three of the Chinese doctors signed this message, stating that since the mother would not consent to the patient's removal, why send the telegram? Within two days I learned how much "boss of the family" the Chinese mother is.

The President answered the message by delegating Captain Tsai Tin-kan to tell me that it would take an "army" to get the patient away from the mother's home if she refused consent. The patient himself said, "I prefer to follow your advice, Dr. Sharpe, and have the operation, as I would be a very poor ruler of my country with one half of my body dead. But my mother does not wish it, and I must obey my mother." Such was filial obedience in China!

While awaiting the President's decision, I had the patient placed on the expectant palliative treatment: non-protein diet, ice helmet, daily catharsis with Epsom salts, and vigorous massage and exercises of the left arm and leg.

The Epsom salts did the trick. Two days after the expectant palliative treatment went into effect, the chief Chinese doctor, who had not been very co-operative in any of this new-fangled treatment, suddenly had a new outlook. He came to me with weariness in his eyes and implored, "Stop the Epsom salts!" He said he would do everything to help if only I would halt the daily administration of Epsom salts.

I was baffled at first, but the enigma was quickly resolved. Fearing death by poison in food or medicine (a common occurrence in Chinese politics), the mother always insisted that two trays of food be prepared. She would then select one for the patient and make the cook eat the food on the other in her presence. And it was the same with medicine: always two samples, one for the patient and the other for the head Chinese doctor. No wonder he was now willing to co-operate!

My next problem was to convince the mother. In my suitcase were a small galvanic electric battery and electrodes for nerve-and muscle-testing—the right equipment for performing magic.

First I demonstrated the contraction of my fingers by applying the electrodes and pressing the contact button. Then I did it with the two foreign doctors, and finally on several of the other doctors.

When she saw I could make their fingers move involuntarily with no harmful effects, I asked her permission to use it upon the patient.

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She was startled. " You can make his dead fingers move in the same way ? " she asked.

I said, " Yes." The idea seemed so incredible to her she resolutely refused. It took two days of demonstrations on doctors and servants before she finally consented and held out his arm for the electrodes.

It was an exciting moment. In the crowded bedroom everyone held his breath as I applied the electrodes to his arm. When I pressed the button an exclamation of " Ah ! " came forth. The " dead " fingers moved ! I did it again. The mother was amazed. So was the patient. When she asked him how he felt, he said fine.

Then I placed the electrodes on his " dead " left leg, pressed the button, and his toes moved. The audience was rapt. So were the mother and son.

The following morning when the son did not complain of any harmful effects from this strange treatment, the mother finally expressed confidence in me for the first time.

She remained adamant, however, in refusing removal to a hospital where X-ray machine and sterile operating-room would be available but beyond her control. As a last resort I asked for permission to perform an exploratory scalp incision under local cocaine anæsthesia—and right in the patient's bedroom.

I thought that a small trephine opening over the right motor area might relieve the underlying cerebral compression of hæmorrhage or even edematous swelling of the brain itself. When I saw that my arguments were making headway, I became outrageously optimistic about the outcome. I urged this operative procedure as a means of restoring the son to a life of usefulness.

I now attribute this brash decision to the exuberance and foolish self-confidence of youth. An operation in a crowded bedroom under such difficult conditions of light, inadequate asepsis, and no trained assistant or nurse was sheer madness, for many reasons. After the operation the head Chinese doctor told me that if the patient had died the mother undoubtedly would have managed my death too. This terrifying intelligence was later corroborated by the American Minister to China.

The fact that the patient was her only son was vital, but I did not realize it at the time. If he died, this " Number One " wife of the President automatically would be relegated to the background and the " Number Two " wife (next in line with a son) would become the mistress of the household. No wonder my life was in danger.

Blithely I went ahead. I had all instruments, towels, and gauze dressing boiled for sterilization. I scrubbed my hands thoroughly

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with soap and water and soaked them in French brandy for five minutes. Then I had the patient moved near a window.

Blissfully unaware of the possible consequences, I injected the local anæsthetic beneath the shaven side of the right parietal area and made a simple linear incision about two inches long. Then I inserted a small retractor on each side of the incision, and let the German doctor hold one and the Frenchman the other.

As the scalp incision was drawn back, almost a tablespoonful of dark red blood clot was exposed. When the clot was removed I could see a linear fracture of the underlying vault of the skull, over one-eighth of an inch in width.

Protruding through this open crack was more semi-solid clot. I began pulling out this semi-clotted blood with a small pair of forceps. Each time some of it was removed from the open line of fracture, more of it was pushed upwards by the increased pressure within the skull. So I kept on removing.

This procedure continued until at least four tablespoonfuls of semi-solid blood clot had been removed, and then almost two ounces more welled out. Hoping that this escape of blood clot might be sufficient to relieve the pressure on the motor area of the brain, I decided to let well enough alone. Instead of making a trephine opening to look in and see, I inserted a small rubber drain at each end of the incision, which I loosely sutured with silk thread.

For three days the drains permitted dark congealed blood to escape from the scalp incision. Then I removed them. On the fourth day the patient began to move the toes of the left foot. Later that same day he moved the fingers of the left hand.

By the eighth day he could move the whole left leg and the entire left arm. By the twelfth day he had improved so much that he was able to move about with improvised crutches.

I was now something of a god. The family and the Chinese doctors themselves thought that it was truly miraculous that by making a small incision on the right side of the patient's head I could bring everything " back to life." Not only the fingers and left arm moved, but even the left leg and toes at the other end of the body !

Oriental gratitude and hospitality brought a young, gaily bedecked Chinese girl to my living-quarters each evening. Her face was heavily rouged, her finger-nails long and red, and her black hair was curled upwards and supported in a mould almost a foot high. She would sit on a cushion by the bedroom door each night until midnight, and then she would leave as quietly as she had come.

Eventually the " Number Three " son of the President asked me why I did not like Chinese girl. I hastily mumbled something

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which was not too coherent even to myself, but which I hoped would convey the idea that there was nothing wrong with her at all—that I was merely an eccentric.

I discovered also that outside the sandstone walls I was no longer regarded as a strange devil. Before the operation, when I used to ride horseback along the streets near the palace, I twice saw an anxiety-ridden mother rush out of the house, grab her small son playing alongside the road, and protect him from me by holding one hand over the small shaven area at the top of the head. In each case the mother cried out to me, "Yang-guëtze!"—meaning, "Foreign devil!"

Each mother thought my foreign evil spirit might get into the child's head through the area on top which had been shaven to permit the entrance of knowledge, but which apparently also made him vulnerable to spirits.

After the operation, when they saw me approaching on horseback, they would hold up their little boys and aim their shaven heads in my direction so that my foreign, but now benevolent, spirit might enter each child's head.

I lived almost a month in lavish splendour—long enough to see how it was corrupting the six sons who were spending their adolescent years doing nothing constructive. They slept through the day and gambled and drank rice wine all night.

But what succulent meals! The late evening dinner, served with small bowls, spoons, and chopsticks, was a profusion of rare and exotic foods. Appetizers of salted ducks' eggs, tiny pancakes that ballooned with crabmeat and mushrooms, cold cuts of pigeon and quail. I had soup of birds' nests, and was served only the choice morsels of roast duck and geese—the browned skin, but not even a paper-thin slice of the underlying breast. The meat was too common—good only for the servants.

I ate sharks' fins and had broiled chicks served in water-lilies. There was rice in every form imaginable, chow mein of all kinds, but no "chop suey" in all China—apparently it is an American dish. There was an endless supply of fruits from the tropics, raw and preserved. And the bowl of warm rice wine was perpetually replenished.

At the end of the meal an aged hard-boiled egg of a "thousand years" was served for its supposedly bicarbonate effect, and, as an afterthought, one more bowl of rice.

Such a meal took three hours at the least. It was really the gathering of the entire family for conversation, and it was most enjoyable. Since the sons were rarely awake for outdoor exercise during the day, I could readily understand how these young men became soft.

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As far as I could see, their only describable exercise was just before sunset, strolling about the garden ponds with a favourite canary in a small cage, and filling and refilling their tiny pipe bowls. But perhaps their amorous indoor sport at night was sufficient to keep them physically fit. Marriage was a simple and frequent thing.

The day before I left for Peking a special service of thanksgiving was held in the old Buddhist temple adjoining the monastery. The building was jammed with people from all walks of life—the long-gowned Buddhist priests, soldiers and townspeople, all chanting and swaying in unison.

In the middle of the ceremony a very aged priest bowed before me, and through my interpreter, Captain Tsai, I learned that any object on the main altar was mine for the taking. He insisted that no sacrilege was involved. I pointed to two small statues, one of the Buddha and one of Confucius. They were handed to me on a small embroidered silk cloth by the head priest after he had blessed the other priests by touching the Buddha to each of their foreheads.

The following morning I made my final neurological examination of the patient. He was now able to take a few steps alone. For the last time I demonstrated to his doctors the daily treatment of vigorous massage and active exercise of his left arm and leg. When I left I was convinced that it was possible for this patient to make a complete recovery of function, if not entire normality. The patient, for his part, was grateful. He even expressed regret that he could not accompany me to the train.

The train entourage was a remarkable assembly. In addition to Captain Tsai and some fifty soldiers, the " Number Three " son of the President was bringing his newly wedded (that morning!) fourth wife to Peking to receive his father's blessing.

The news of how I had brought the " dead " arm and leg back to life had spread along the railroad to Peking. Crowds were waiting wherever the train stopped, and at the insistence of Captain Tsai and the patient's brother I had to appear like a political candidate on the rear platform. I am sure that no politician ever had such a trusting or clamorous audience.

At every stop the shaven heads of little boys were held up towards me by their mothers—a ritual that somehow made me uneasy. It was not a comforting thought to realize how little it takes to provoke utterly irrational obeisance. No wonder charlatans can create fantastic followings!

The day after reaching Peking I was conducted to the President's palace for a report and reception, and I shall never forget it. President Yüan was seated in a large chair at the head of a huge teakwood table, flanked by two soldiers with rifles. When I

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approached he rose with some difficulty and welcomed me graciously.

We then had tea in small cups, and cigarettes, and I gave him a detailed report of the operation and the happy outlook for his son, after which a large case of iced champagne was placed on the table. We all drank toasts to the patient and to each other.

During the festivity, Captain Tsai told me that the President wished me to remain in Peking and be his private doctor. He said the President would give me ten times as much money as I could make anywhere in the world. Apparently the President felt that if I could bring life back to one half of his son's body, I might be able to keep his entire body alive and well despite his seventy years.

I told the President that the treatment was scientific and in no way connected with magic. When I added that the Harvard Medical School in Shanghai was training Chinese medical students to perform such operations, he had a map of Shanghai brought to him and promptly designated fifteen acres to be donated by the Chinese government for a new hospital, laboratories, and classrooms of the Harvard School.

I thanked him profusely. When he asked me to name my fee for my services to his son, I was at a loss. I said it was difficult to arrive at any figure, that whatever he saw fit to give me would be perfectly satisfactory.

A few minutes later Captain Tsai handed me a sealed envelope. We bowed to each other; I put the envelope into my pocket, and we continued drinking. I woke next morning in a bed at the palace.

Later Captain Tsai accompanied me to my suite at the hotel and asked me to look at a princess of the former Manchu dynasty who was seriously ill. I told him I would do so that afternoon and would wait for the two Chinese doctors to call for me at three o'clock.

Alone at the hotel, I remembered the envelope handed to me at the palace and opened it. The enclosed cheque was made out to me for one hundred thousand taels—approximately fifty thousand dollars! This operating fee was among the first I received. It remains the largest.

That afternoon two Chinese doctors escorted me to a palatial home in a private park almost in the centre of Peking. After coming into the large entrance-hall, we were shown to a heavily curtained passageway.

Beneath the folds of the curtain protruded two small braided cords. I was supposed to sit on a nearby cushioned stool, take one cord in my left hand and the other in my right, and ponder for ten

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minutes. In this manner I was to diagnose the ailment of the patient, who was lying on the other side of the curtain with the opposite ends of the cords tied around her wrists.

In Chinese medicine it was believed possible for the doctor to diagnose by feeling the pulse-beat in each wrist. There were supposed to be " five pulses," the upper one registering conditions in the head, the next one those of the neck, the third one the chest, and so on.

The Chinese doctor would feel the pulse of one wrist with the fingers of his two hands for a period of at least ten minutes, and then would make a similar " examination " of the other wrist for another ten minutes. After this he would announce his diagnosis of the disease and its location in the body of the patient. When the patient was a virgin, however, the Chinese doctor could not touch the flesh of her wrists. He made his diagnosis by holding the two cords attached to the patient's wrists—in an adjoining room, moreover.

After hearing this explanation I said I couldn't help and walked to the door. A servant ran up and announced that the patient's mother would let us enter the sickroom and feel the pulse directly. She would permit this because I had restored to life one half of the body of the President's son.

We went into the bedroom. Between the folds of silken curtains in the far corner drooped the extended hand of our patient.

In the presence of the girl's mother and several servants I picked up the hand to feel the pulse—and had a shock. The hand was stone-cold. She had been dead for two days, but the parents thought I might be able to make her live again. I mumbled something about my inability to be of any aid and hurried out.

I knew I had lost face.

* * *

## *TWO GOLDFISH*

There was once a man who went to a country fair and won two goldfish in a little round bowl.

When he got home he put the bowl on his sideboard and every evening used to amuse himself by watching the two fish for ever swimming round and round the bowl, one after the other.

After several months a surprising thing happened. One of the fish caught the other up and swimming for a moment or two side by side with her at last exclaimed breathlessly: " I say, miss, what are you doing on Thursday ? "

JOHN WALLER, *Shaggy Dog and other Surrealist Fables*

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★*On the lid, a brass plate with the young owner's name —proudly followed by the magic letters, R.N. The author of the "Tall Ship," "A Ditty Box" and scores of other well loved sea stories presents a new naval occasion when he opens his sea chest of memories and describes his early days in the Royal Navy.*

# SEA CHEST

## by BARTIMEUS

"AND what," asked a departing lady visitor, pointing at it, "is that?"

I had grown so used to it where it stood in the hall, enamelled, waxed, polished, a mere article of furniture, that I had forgotten all that it had stood for in my life. I had almost to make an effort of memory before I answered:

"That used to be my sea chest."

Yet I suppose it looked very much the same—except for the gleaming shininess of its surface—when I first made its acquaintance on the sleeping deck of the *Hindustan*, where the two junior terms in the naval training-ship *Britannia* slept in cloistered seclusion.

The lid was painted black and the sides were white, and the corners were fortified by metal, and the Lord knows they were to need fortifying in the years ahead of them. On top of the lid was a brass plate with the owner's name on it, followed by the magic letters: R.N. I do not think anything, not even my uniform, brought home to me so vividly the full splendour and significance of the fact that I was actually a Naval Cadet, as did those two letters graven on a brazen tablet on the lid of my sea chest. Such is the power of the written symbol.

But this was not my first impression because when I first saw it the chest was open, and inside the lid was a variety of glorious objects—a telescope, a mirror, two brass sconces for candles (they must have been survivals from the pre-electric-light era in ships, and I do not recall that they were ever put to their proper use), and clips, in which in due course, in all its gleaming tasselled splendour, my dirk would rest.

The body of the chest contained, as I remember, three compartments. One held underwear and linen; in the middle one was stowed uniform and such plain clothes (or what a benighted

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Army referred to as mufti) as I possessed when I went to sea; the right-hand one was a bit of a glory-hole: soiled linen, "coaling gear"—a strange medley of garments worn when coaling ship—and boots, mingled together in a sort of grimy pot-pourri beneath which my Marine Servant stowed, by permission, curios purchased in outlandish ports for his family, and on one occasion, but lacking the permission, a bottle of illicit rum.

But all this came later during the years afloat, and I must contemplate a moment longer this repository of all my worldly possessions while still a feature of life in the *Britannia*. There were trays, a private till that locked, and a metal washhand-basin—another relic of the past that lingered in the sea chest's interior, like the appendix inside its owner, no longer performing any useful function; or rather not functioning according to its designer's plan, because a neighbour of mine, passionately devoted to wild life, found it an admirable receptacle for a grass-snake: and when that was discovered and sent ashore, a succession of wee tim'rous beasties, field mice and the like, that were his solace in moments of acute home-sickness.

Custom sanctioned other solaces. Fastened with drawing-pins in what space remained available inside the lid, it was permissible to assemble photographs of parents, brothers and sisters, even a favourite dog—threads growing ever more and more tenuous, that held one to a home, receding imperceptibly further and further into the background of everyday thought.

The ownership of a good-looking sister had decided merit. You invited your more intimate friends to a sort of private view. One monster was so far lost to brotherly feelings as to barter his sister's photograph to a friend (at a time of acute insolvency) in exchange for sustenance in the stodge-shop. The friend displayed it in *his* sea chest lid as a "sort of relation," which was stretching the point a bit if not actually partaking of the nature of the white slave traffic . . .

The more senior terms' photographic display passed beyond relatives. One dashing fellow actually paraded the photograph of a popular musical comedy actress, signed moreover in a bold flourish beneath the caption "Most Sincerely Yours." It was fashionable to suggest that he had bought the photograph and forged the signature, but envious doubts lingered in the hearts of even the most sceptical. There might be something in it after all . . . Anyhow he came, as might have been expected, to a bad end.

The more home faded into the background of memory, forced there by the impact of unfamiliar nautical learning, smells, experiences and friends, the more one's sea chest came to possess

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the sanctity of a shrine. The Romans would certainly have invented a minor deity to preside over it. We did in fact say our prayers kneeling at it: many continued the observance at sea throughout their association with a chest.

I recall undressing one night in my first seagoing ship (a battleship with, of all oddities, her two funnels abreast) when a rat ran across the upturned soles of a fellow midshipman's feet while he knelt against his chest. He screamed like a wounded hare and confided to me later, over the canvas rim of his hammock, that there were points about being an atheist . . .

The sacrist of this shrine was of course one's Marine Servant, such being their title before a tetchier age substituted Attendant for Servant. Actually in the earlier years of my service they were Bandsmen who volunteered for the duty. This must have been before the days of the Band of the Royal Marines because I recall that they wore blue serge uniform with white piping, peaked caps, and many of them were Maltese. Otherwise memory holds no very clear picture of them—except that when we went to "Action Stations" they were armed with pikes, such as are seen today on board H.M.S. *Victory*, to repel boarders.

Then I was wafted to the China Station and was tended by the first of a long dynasty of Royal Marines who were not only faithful servants but loyal and protective friends. This one was a huge "Blue" Marine with a badly broken nose. It was such a catastrophic wreck of a nose that it seriously impeded his speech and compelled him to snore perpetually.

He could never find any garment I wanted, and after nearly fifty years I can still see him delving among my belongings, his head and shoulders hidden in the depths of the chest, from which emerged agitated snores but nothing else. I suppose we must have held converse during the three years we were shipmates but the only one that memory holds was on just such an occasion: I had bidden him to produce a garment we had between us "lost the run of" and he had gone snoring about a task he plainly regarded as hopeless from the outset, presenting an enormous backside in blue serge trousers, ornamented with a broad red stripe, for my contemplation. His snores came up from the depths of the chest like bubbles from a diver's helmet.

MYSELF, (by way of passing the time). How did you come to break your nose so badly?

BLUE MARINE. I was along of a woman once an' her husband come in unexpected an' I jumped out of the winder an' I landed on my nose. Cosham way, she lived—First floor.

I have transposed this into plain English for the convenience of

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the reader. I remember with a curious vividness sitting on an adjoining sea chest and trying (I wasn't very old) to reconstruct in my imagination this astonishing drama on the other side of the world, the first of its kind to which I had been introduced by an actual participator.

Not only did our Marine Servants guard our possessions jealously (I never remember losing a garment in all the years of my service) from the depredations of other midshipmen, but they arranged among themselves (usually unknown to the owners) temporary loans and adjustments of wardrobes in moments of crisis.

Being invited to dine in the wardroom, or worse, with the Captain, usually produced a major one. In response to an agitated demand for a clean shirt would come some such answer as the following: "We ain't got one. The dhobie ain't brought 'em back. But Mr. So-and-So, he's got two. Bran new from England last mail. Same size neck-band as what ours is. You leave it to me, sir."

The passing of the years swelled the picture gallery in the lid of our chests. Those of parents and sisters faded somewhat (they even grew a little mildewed) and were supplemented by friends and bygone shipmates. I have a collection of them still, in a cardboard box, candid eyes smiling out of alert smooth faces above preposterous collars. One wears a beard and as nobody had ever heard of a midshipman with a beard the achievement created no small stir in the Fleet, especially as it was a very luxuriant one.

It was a life of crowded decks and gun-room, of what Kipling called "an appalling intimacy," thousands of miles from home, carefree enough in its poverty, almost brutal in its complete absence of comfort or privacy. And one's sea chest stood for something indefinable—like one's own bedroom at home, a refuge, a peculiar and intimate possession that was almost part of a secret and inner self.

When there descended upon us—as does occasionally upon all lonely adolescents, a sort of morbid homesickness which the French Foreign Legion calls "cafard," and the modern army "browned off," it was not unusual to seek one's sea chest, and removing the centre tray and sufficient garments to admit most of one's person, to subside backwards into the interior, and to stay there, in something of the posture of an embryo within the matrix, with legs dangling over the edge from the knees downwards, and one's chin on a level with them, in moody and disconsolate meditation until one felt better.

Only yesterday for the first time for many years, I lifted

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inquisitively the lid of what used to be my sea chest. Some tarnished drawing-pins still stuck where once the photographs were fastened: and from the interior came these oddly palpable memories, trivial and inconsequent, as indeed are most of the flights of man's fancy.

* * *

## *BY ANY OTHER NAME*

Long ago, I wrote a short story about an exquisite girl, Prunella or Phillida or Perdita, I forget which, who loved all her accessories to be as exquisite and doubtless as expensive as herself: her luggage, her letter-paper, her ivory toilet set. She was therefore reluctantly compelled to marry a Mr. Robinson, elderly, wealthy and prosaic, stout, baldish, red in the face, for the sake of maintaining her fastidious elegance and all her shapely appurtenances. Nevertheless, her sense of values being slightly awry, she found it a daily trial that, come what may, she was Mrs. Robinson.

Then, worthy man, he died, leaving her all his money with no other condition attached than that if she married again, Robinson was to be hyphenated on to her new surname. And now at last she dared fall in love. He was shabby, he was poor, he was anonymous, but he was young, he was slim, he was handsome, he adored her, he was a poet. And when he proposed to her, almost at once after their first romantic encounter, who could have been readier to say "Yes, oh yes, my darling, *yes*!"

Until she discovered that *his* name was Robinson.

Perdita Robinson-Robinson. Or else for the rest of her life to forfeit all those fastidious elegant expensive shapely delicate tributes-to-Perdita without which she could not endure to exist; luggage, letter-paper, ivory toilet set, etc. So she refused him.

G. B. STERN, *A Name to Conjure With*

* * *

## *ARGOSY FOR H.M. FORCES*

*When you have finished reading this copy of* ARGOSY, *why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?*

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# Crusader's Key

BERTRAN de Salars, lord of Caraman and Salars, a Poor Knight of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, said to his wife Jehane, "There is in my mind no smallest doubt of your honesty, nor must you think that what I am now about to do can ever be regarded as an insult to you, as a reflection on your character, or an indication of my lessening esteem. I am afraid it will be necessary for you to take off all your clothes."

With some bitterness in her voice the Lady Jehane answered, "If you do not doubt my honesty, I cannot see why you should take such precautions to keep me honest as make it seem that good behaviour is contrary to my intentions."

"You are a woman," said Bertran mildly.

"It is late in the day to reproach me with that," said Jehane. "I think you have been glad of it once or twice, and now to blame me for what was God's will and has been your pleasure is mere petulance, and not worthy of a knight who proposes to venture his body for the rescue of God's holy city from the Saracens, since God in His wisdom made Eve as well as Adam, and said no word to Adam whereby he should think it right to reproach her with the nature and condition established in her to further His purpose of comforting Adam with a helpmeet and a lover. Still less did He give man warrant, in that garden where warrant was given for so much, to load a woman with chains and put padlocks on her when he went abroad on errands of his own choosing."

"You are overwrought," said Bertran, "and so you fall into a torrent of words without perceiving to what shoal of fallacy they bear you. For it was not God but the Serpent who gave to Eve that part of her nature which, in these wicked and degenerate times, appears to dominate all the rest. Nor do I believe that even the Serpent would so have worked upon her had he properly foreseen the future. In Eden there was no other man save Adam, but now there are men walking in every field. And since it is woman's part, as you have said, to be a helpmeet and a lover, man must of his own wit—that God gave him—devise means whereby his wife shall love

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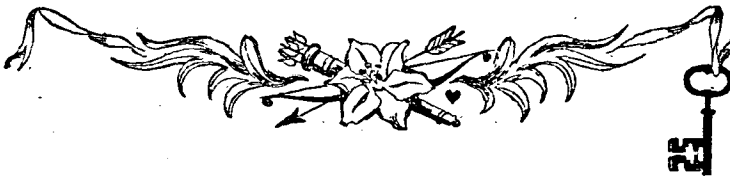

by Eric Linklater

and help him only, and not squander her mercies on all the world. You must take off your shift as well, my dear."

"There then!" said Lady Jehane, and passionately threw the garment from her. Her cheeks were bright red, from modesty a little and from indignation a great deal, and so hot was her blood that the March wind, blowing lustily through the tower window, chilled her not at all but merely tempered her anger.

"You are very beautiful," said Bertran.

"Keep your mind on the Sepulchre," said Lady Jehane.

"My thought is fixed on it and my heart is ever grieved for its present unhappy state," said Bertran. "I do not think you will find the chain uncomfortable, and the links are so smoothly worked that they cannot chafe you. The padlock, I admit, is somewhat heavy, but were it lightly made it could not be secure."

"My heart was light, yet my love for you lay safely in it," said Lady Jehane.

"I shall be gone three years," said Bertran, "and every month of those years the temptation of benevolence will assail you, pricking of the flesh will stir your woman's wish to give, and voices in your blood will call as dry earth calls loudly for the piercing rain . . ."

"No, no!" cried Jehane. "I am your wife, faithful to you and desirous of no other man."

"You are a woman," said Bertran, "and I shall be gone three years." Then he put round her waist the girdle that was called the Crusader's Belt—since many knights and noblemen so guarded their wives from shame and even, they hoped, imprudent thoughts while they, far off, battled with the infidel for Christ's tomb and captured city—and when he had adjusted the chain so that it lay close to her side, and yet not so close as to cause discomfort, he fastened it with a heavy padlock, locking that with a key, and tied the key to a cord that he put about his neck.

"This I shall call your heart's key," said Bertran, "and it shall lie against the beating of my own heart."

But Jehane made no answer. She put on her clothes again with

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abrupt and trembling movements, and in her bearing was a muted mildness. She stood by the narrow window, high in the round grey wall of the tower, and looked at the liberty of earth beyond her.

Clouds rolled or swam in open sky ; the wind leapt freely through black branches flushed green at their myriad tips with buds half-opened ; a hawk poised, trod empty space, and swooped ; lambs leapt with ungainly joy in tilted fields—but Lady Jehane, hands pressed to waist, felt under her fingers the hard steel chain, and her body shrank within its hold, and beneath its weight her strength grew weak. She breathed harshly through her open mouth, and heard her lord's farewell only as some unmeaning noise. She gave him her hand to kiss, but her hand was cold, her head averted.

" I shall not be happy till Jerusalem is girt with Christian steel as you are girt," said Bertran.

" Ah, poor city ! " cried Jehane.

" Poor city indeed, and that is why we must ride to its relief."

From her window Jehane looked down and saw the horsemen stiffen to obedience when her lord came out to them. At his word they mounted and rode from the courtyard. Women followed, clamorous at their horses' heels, children shrilly whooped, and those with a better understanding as noisily wept. When the Crusaders had forded the river, splashing through bright shallow water, they turned southwards and rode in file.

Bertran waited by the ford till they had crossed. Then he turned to his castle and saluted Lady Jehane—though he could no longer see her, because she had turned away from her window to sit on a little stool and crouch there like an old woman, thinking nothing whatever about the perils and discomfort to which her lord was riding, but very bitterly concerned with her own misery.

The lord of Caraman and Salars sighed and shook his head in a wistful movement that consorted badly with his military appearance, with the short manly beard he wore in compliance with Templar custom, and, indeed, with the Templar tradition to waste no time on topics of sentiment. But though he knew Jehane to be unhappy, and though the knowledge grieved him, he comforted himself with the assurance that he had acted wisely and for the ultimate benefit of both himself and his wife. He patted his brown surcoat, with the great red cross on it, and felt beneath it her heart's key.

" She is safe," he thought, and putting spurs to his horse cantered to overtake his troop.

For a week of tedious days the Lady Jehane maintained a demeanour that to her household appeared the perfection of widowed grief. She was listless, she would not eat, her cheeks were pale and her eyes were red, she was irritable when spoken to, and would burst into tears to atone for her unkindness.

" Ah ! " said her servants and her friends, " what desire she has for that Bertran with his Templar's beard, his heavy speech, and his concern for this matter of the Sepulchre ! Who would have thought that such a man could blow love's flame so hot, and leave so desolate a hearth behind him ? "

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But the truth was that Jehane never gave a thought to her lord except in the way of anger against his stupidity. Under a seeming gaiety and lightness of manner she was in reality extremely virtuous, and though she delighted in the society of troubadours and others who spoke much about the art of love, she had never felt the slightest inclination to abandon herself to its illicit practice. To be loved by Bertran was rather different, of course, though even his embraces, despite the favouring circumstance of the Church's blessing, had really given her very little pleasure. And love unconsecrated was mere bestiality.

That Bertran could think of her yielding to brutish heat like a heifer in the fields or some gap-toothed peasant in a barn! That was pride-shattering, that broke her heart as though her heart had been herself in a mirror broken by a stone.

And then there was the intolerable burden of the chain, ever present, printing her side with its abominable links, and by its presence fixing her mind on the lewdness it prohibited. She had no wish to think of evil, but the chain held her to thoughts of evil as surely as it bound her to continence.

"It makes me a slave, it makes me an animal," she thought. It was, moreover, extremely uncomfortable.

And then one morning Jehane was wakened by the amorous voice of the troubadour Simon Vidal singing an alba, or morning song, to her sister Maulfry, a laughing, handsome girl to whom such flattery was often paid. The alba was a passionate complaint against the intrusive sun, that drove back the friendly dark and with cruel fingers tore lovers from their lovers' arms.

*So coldly blows the wind of dawn*
*Upon a naked heart,*

sang the troubadour.

"It sounds quite sincere and convincing," thought Jehane. "Someone who knew nothing of our customs might well believe that he had really spent the night in Maulfry's arms and was singing out of uncontrollable grief at parting from her. But he has probably given several days to the composition of so charming a lyric, and was wakened by his servant just in time to get up and sing it so that the sun might rise on its last notes."

Vidal sang another verse. Though shrill with pain, his voice retained the loveliness of conscious art, and the melody was plucked with proficient yearning from the strings of his lute:

*I flee before the sharp-edged light*
*Towards another dark;*
*How cold becomes the world at dawn—*
*Cover your naked heart!*

"I wonder!" thought Jehane. "That last verse seems to have a more personal note than is usual, though, of course, many troubadours make their songs provocative enough, and try to give the impression that even more has happened than they are willing to

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tell. But nobody really believes them when they are like that, and it would be a pity indeed if people did believe them, and so forced them to speak the truth, for you can't make much poetry out of truth alone or compose a song by merely saying what actually occurred.

"And yet I feel rather anxious about Maulfry, for there was certainly a lot of feeling in Vidal's alba, and she is brave enough for anything. Perhaps he did spend the night in her room!"

Then—"Why," thought Lady Jehane, "now I am getting like poor Bertran, who always thinks the worst has happened or is going to happen. Were it not for this wretched chain I should never have suspected anything, but under its influence I am ready to believe in all manner of impropriety.

"People really do seem wickeder than I used to think them, but then formerly I was so innocent that I could rarely imagine how evil occurred, and had to take the world's lewdness on trust. Which was, perhaps, a little dull on the whole. But now I have no difficulty whatever in picturing the vicious state into which society has fallen."

And a little later she exclaimed, "It is Bertran's fault, and he has only himself to blame! It is due solely to his action that henceforth I shall not only take pleasure in believing the worst about people, but also in behaving myself with all the impropriety of which I am capable. It is true that I am not capable of much, owing to this miserable chain, but I shall do what I can to justify Bertran's belief that it was necessary!"

Lady Jehane was now happier than she had been since her lord first announced his intention of girdling her to compulsory chastity. From that morning when she heard Vidal singing, her demeanour changed, and the castle of Caraman, that had shared her gloom, now participated in her gaiety.

Under the quickening influence of spring, troubadours were rivalling the mating birds in the profusion of their melodies—while far excelling the simple lark and the untutored willow-wren in fertility of invention—and some of the most accomplished paid visits to the castle of Caraman when they heard that not only the Lady Maulfry but also the Lady Jehane was in a mood to welcome their art and themselves.

Vidal, hopelessly enslaved by the beauty and gaiety of Maulfry, had become rather one of the household than a passing guest. Under the soporific influence of a permanent interest and a settled domicile, his songs had acquired a certain monotony—though that which awakened Jehane had been brilliantly individual—but now, when other minstrels sang in his hearing their delight in Jehane's fair beauty, his wit was stirred afresh and his jealous pride in Maulfry found expression in ever new and more daring felicities.

This championship of dark Maulfry, vaunting her eyes in a brave conceit and her lips in the most exquisite of tunes, inspired in its turn the visiting troubadours to novelties in compliment and rare device in melody when their opportunity came to hymn the golden loveliness of Jehane. For if Maulfry was starlight on the velvet breast of night, Jehane—as one of them remarked—was dawn lifting

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its small clouds of white and rose from a pale gold field of barley. Maulfry, to put it shortly, was dark and slender, while Jehane was very fair and somewhat inclined to plumpness.

So timing his arrival that he could bear with him the first spray of almond-blossom, Gilles de Mercadet came one morning to the castle. When his name was announced, a flutter of anticipation passed over the ladies of the castle like a breeze that comes roughly into a flower-garden, and those of the gentlemen present who were interested in poetry turned with the liveliest expectancy to see him whose fame as a troubadour outstripped even his reputation as a lover.

Gilles de Mercadet was tall and excessively handsome. His legs were long, his brow was broad and white, his hair had the sombre brilliance of a raven's wing. His chin was determined, his nose severe, and his eyes were dark and lustrous under melancholy lids. His hands were shapely, and a nervous passion animated his fingers. He came into the hall with his joglar behind him—a little man, ugly and red-faced—and fell on his knees before Lady Jehane. She welcomed him gladly, and took the almond-blossom from him, and put it to her lips.

After the interchange of some courtesies Jehane said, "You have travelled far, sir, I think, for had you been living in this neighbourhood, I would have heard of it."

"I have come from Perpignan," said Gilles.

"That is far enough," said Jehane, "and I am glad you have had so long a journey, since now you will be tired of travel and content to stay here."

"Does any man who has once seen you ever go farther or fare home again?"

"My husband has gone to the Holy Land," said Jehane.

"Marriage, that gives a man rights, ever robs him of reason," said Gilles.

After a while Maulfry asked, "Did you not find the air of Perpignan to your liking, sir?"

"The air was good enough," said Gilles, "but those who used it were less to my fancy."

"I have heard the ladies there are most beautiful," said Jehane.

"Even were they as beautiful as they esteem themselves, that would not excuse their demand for admiration," said Gilles.

"We are modest people here," said Jehane.

"Then your virtue must exceed your judgment," answered the troubadour.

On the following morning de Mercadet looked white and weary. His eyes were more profoundly dark, hooded more deeply by their melancholy lids, and his cheeks were pale with the transparent pallor of suffering.

With the anxiety of a hostess and a woman's pity for the pain of a young man so handsome, Lady Jehane asked if he had not slept well.

"I was visited by something more importunate than sleep," he said. "An inspiration, a thought, a vision," he explained, seeing Jehane looked questioningly from one to another of her ladies.

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" Perhaps your room was not comfortable," she suggested.

" It has a window," said Gilles. Then he took his lute from the joglar, and after striking two or three preliminary chords to arrest the general attention—which he did very easily—he sang the following lines to a tune of surpassing merit :

*I looked through my window and caught my heart with a cry*
*To see the late moon and the dawn sharing the sky.*

*I saw the slim gold crescent of the old moon lean*
*Over the hill in a vapour of gull's-egg-green ;*

*While a span to the north another day began*
*As the sun's bright fingers opened an apricot fan—*

*Faced with the loveliness of those lovely two,*
*Lady Jehane, how could I help thinking of you ?*

To all but one of the many compliments evoked by this charming song de Mercadet seemed indifferent. Even to Jehane, who thanked him in words as pretty as the song, he seemed more concerned with some secret thought of his own than with the expression of hers, though that might have gratified any poet on earth with its politeness.

But when Simon Vidal, his fellow troubadour, said with all the enthusiasm of his generous nature how greatly he admired the contrast between the level pacing of the verse rhythm and the urgent fire of the accompaniment, why then de Mercadet was roused, grew talkative, excited even, and played again to show how the heavy words reined back the sweet impatience of the melody. Talking still, of sirventes and tenson, of alba, serena, and planh, the two poets went off together, leaving their audience somewhat astonished and rather at a loss for further amusement.

But Jehane, sitting alone, was well pleased with de Mercadet's strange behaviour, for she thought it meant—despite his reputation for gallantry—that he was a poet enthusiastic only for his art, and so not likely to embarrass her with the attentions of a lover. For though she had resolved to fling propriety to the winds, she found this to be more difficult than she had expected, and much less pleasant. Adventures, even upon the outermost fringes of love's play, made her strangely uncomfortable.

Her daughter, a child some two or three years old, was a plain little girl with a strong resemblance to her father in her small blunt nose and square chin ; and whenever a courtier became gallant, Jehane would unfortunately remember the little Aélis and foolishly experience a sensation of guilt. Her belief that de Mercadet would be content to sing of love, without endeavouring to practise it, was therefore most comforting.

For some days his behaviour was all she could desire. His demeanour was that of a man ravaged by passion, his pale cheeks were apparently the emblem of a lover's pain, and his black hair suggested the ensign of a dying heart. But he appeared satisfied with the composition of several charming songs, ardent indeed, but

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with a kind of impersonal poetic ardour rather than a lover's heat; and in a tenson with Simon Vidal he raked the visible universe for symbols and similes with which to praise his mistress, but so contrived his flattery that it had an air of detached criticism wholly devoid of any insinuation that the flatterer might be entitled to a reward for his discernment.

So completely lulled were Jehane's suspicions that one evening, some weeks after de Mercadet's arrival at the castle, she walked with him alone in a garden by the river and watched with him the moon's image in the wrinkled water, and saw it run in silver slippers to the still obscurity of the farther bank.

The air was full of summer perfumes. A nightingale sang, its voice choking with sweetness, and stopped on a broken note. Then de Mercadet turned to Jehane, and with a passion in his voice that he no longer troubled to conceal, sang softly:

*Silent sits the nightingale*
*To hear the passion of my cry;*
*Paler grows the moon so pale*
*To see how pale am I—*
*Pity me, Lady Jehane,*
*Pity me, else I die!*

Jehane was seriously perturbed by this sudden attack. She was immediately conscious of opposing forces that tore her soul, and between the soft importunacy of her senses—stirred by music, the scented night, and the pandering moon—and the strong restraint of her moral nature—aggravated by fear of her impetuous lover—she was in a truly pitiable state.

Her heart was touched by desire, but her knees were trembling in their fright before a lover. The fleeing moon cried "Yes!" but a memory of her snub-nosed daughter clutched her skirts and holloa'd "No!"

With a plea for gentleness and a promise for tomorrow, she won respite from de Mercadet, and returned to the castle in a greater flutter than she had known since, at the age of thirteen, her sleep was spoiled by a vision of St. Michael bearing an outrageously destructive sword.

Not till she was alone in her room did she remember, with a sense of anticlimax, her protective girdle and the key that hung round the lord of Caraman's neck in Acre or Cyprus or some such distant place.

Now de Mercadet laid siege in earnest, and as the constant state of excitement in which she lived notably increased Jehane's beauty, so the troubadour's ardour was maintained not only by resistance but by the steady growth of her charm. She also acquired, without knowing it, the pricking art of the coquette, and so for a week she would be coldly virtuous, for a day she would be fond and warm, kissing even, once even clinging and on the point, so it seemed, of yielding utterly.

De Mercadet's manner was variable as hers, for in the morning

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he often behaved with the insolence of a dictator, and in the evening as frequently threw himself at Jehane's feet in the attitude of a slave. He made a certain number of songs in her honour, but it was generally remarked that they were far inferior to his earlier compositions.

He added new verses to that which bore the refrain :

*Pity me, Lady Jehane,*
*Pity me, else I die !*

—and those best qualified to estimate the merit of such things declared that no part of it was worthy of a troubadour of his reputation. But if de Mercadet's creative power declined, so did Jehane's critical ability, for in time she grew to think that refrain the most exquisite and moving verse she had ever heard.

It was on a day in autumn that de Mercadet drove her to her last defence, and she had to confess that she wore a chain binding her to impenetrable chastity. On other occasions when the troubadour's wooing pressed her hard, she had sometimes conveniently forgotten the belt, sometimes most opportunely remembered it—but she had never mentioned it.

It was her last rampart, her ultimate winning card, and now when de Mercadet had at last stormed all other opposition, and treachery in her own breast cried her to surrender, she told him, in a mood between triumph and despair, of the proscriptive chain, the inviolable lock.

For a little while de Mercadet was nonplussed. His attitude proclaimed defeat. He stood by an open window and let the wind blow coldly on his tears. Then, turning the situation upside down, he saw suddenly both comfort and hope in the steely prohibition of the Crusader's belt.

He cried excitedly, " This, then, is the reason you have so long refused me ! This paltry chain is the only bar to our felicity ! I had thought you lacked love to meet my love, and that was why you turned from me so often and so coldly, and thinking that, I came near to despair. But now I know that nothing but a few steel links have kept you from my arms—"

" No, no ! " cried Jehane.

" Now I am assured of that, I grow happy indeed. For steel can be cut, links broken, or padlocks picked. I will get keys, Jehane, a sharp biting file, and loose you from these trifling shackles within the hour."

Indignant and queenly tall, Jehane said furiously, " Do you expect me to strip and stand naked while you do your tinker-work ? You are mad indeed if that is what you hope."

" Then I will find a smith," exclaimed the troubadour, " some old and shrivelled smith, and pay him well for his work, and then put out his eyes for daring to see the glory of your waist."

But Jehane grew angrier still and cried, " Am I a horse that I should be taken to the smithy, or do you think me a monster that I should scratch men blind ? "

De Mercadet had some difficulty in pacifying her, but presently

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she grew more calm, and then he left her, saying he would think of other means to get rid of the obstructive belt, and bade her be of good cheer in expectation of success.

The following day, when chance left them alone together, he said with great eagerness, "Lady Jehane, the most difficult problems often have very simple answers. Now this is the truth, that you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, but you are far from being the slenderest."

"So!" said Jehane. "You call me fat now! Well, that is a change from your compliments."

Patiently de Mercadet explained that he had said nothing of the sort. He had never mentioned fatness.

"Is Juno fat because her beauty is more amply drawn than Diana's?" he asked. "Has not a flowing curve, an arc, more beauty than a poor straight line? What is there to see or commend in a green stick of girlhood? But every contour of your perfect womanhood is Cupid's bow bent to kill."

"Is there any point to all this?" asked Jehane.

De Mercadet hesitated. "It might be possible," he said, "to reduce the fullness of your beauty without impairing its essential quality. And if by chance you grew more slim—if Love's bow were here and there unbent . . ."

"The chain would fall off as from a green stick of girlhood?"

De Mercadet bowed. "Will you not spare a penny or two of your beauty's opulence to buy love itself?"

"And how am I to do that?" asked Jehane.

"There are various ways. Some strenuous exercise, for example . . ."

"What," said Jehane, "shall I kick and prance, turn flesh to dew, and wipe it off? You must think of some easier way than that, good Gilles."

Again the troubadour spoke with a diffidence unusual in him. "Hermits and other ascetic people grow thin by living on a meagre diet of root and herbs."

"So you would have me starve for love's sake?" said Jehane. "But such a plan appeals to me no more than jumping does, and I shall neither run to make me lean as a hunting dog, nor starve to grow thin as an anchorite, since the sole benefit from either would be yours in possessing me."

Because the Lady Jehane was in so difficult a mood, de Mercadet made no attempt to expose the fallacy in her last statement, nor indeed to recommend further the courses he had already suggested. But with an air of melancholy arrogance he begged leave to go, and left her. Nor did he leave her for the moment only, but for a space of several days.

Servants saw him in the early morning, when the river mist accentuated his pallor, as he walked solitary in the gardens; and in the evening twilight one might observe him by the edge of a wood, dark against its darkness, and staring into the sky as though impatient

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for the coming obscurity of night. But except for these crepuscular glimpses he was rarely visible, and he spoke to no one.

The reason for his strange conduct was widely canvassed and gave ground for much conversation. The friends and servants of Lady Jehane were inclined to be proud of their supposition that she had broken his heart, for they would in a sense share in her prestige if this were so.

But Jehane herself was scarcely so happy. In de Mercadet's absence she felt more drawn to him than had been usual while he sat beside her, and she thought about love, even illicit love, with a broader mind when its exponent was no longer at hand to put her tolerance to the test. Since there was now no one to speak to her of love—for all others had retired before de Mercadet's wooing—she thought she would like to be loved.

She remembered the troubadour's suggestion that she might grow slimmer, and so rid herself of the belt, by attention to her diet. She considered her image in several mirrors and discovered with some reluctance that her beauty might even be enhanced by judicious decrement of its superfluity. And so for an unhappy meal or two she pushed the cream-jug away from her, tortured her appetite with lettuce and a biscuit, and when her friends proffered sweetmeats, turned with a shudder in the opposite direction.

This asceticism was of brief duration, however. Jehane's loss of appetite was reported in the kitchens, and her cook, a loyal and loving servant, set his mind to the confection of a pie that would restore her to health by its irresistible awakening of hunger. In this he most happily succeeded.

As ambergris will proclaim its virtue from afar, so did the pie. An odour of richness came out of it, not in a great vulgar gust, but in subtle streams and airs that took the nose with sweetness and brought moisture to the tongue. When Lady Jehane smelt this enchanting smell, her thought was, "How poor and frail a thing is love compared with table joys!"

The idea of starving herself for such a trifling pleasure as de Mercadet's embraces appeared, in view of this magnificent pie, so wild an absurdity, that she laughed aloud, and covered the amazement that her laughter produced by calling to her sewer, "Cut quickly, man! Must our hunger wait for your convenience?"

Thereupon her sewer invaded the pie with a great knife, and cutting a thick wedge of crumbling pastry discovered beneath it a store of larks, leverets, quails, pigeons and other small fowl.

"Love!" thought Lady Jehane scornfully as she filled her mouth with this succulent variety, "What man's love is worth a lark and leveret pie?"

And as she pushed her manchet of bread into the hot dark gravy, she was vastly amused to think of anyone forsaking the joy of eating to take a lover or find beauty in slimness. "Green sticks of girlhood!" she muttered.

"Boy," she said to her page, "bring me more pie!" And patted her plumpness with a sigh of content.

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She was eating sugar-plums when de Mercadet found her that afternoon. She felt a little pang of remorse when she saw how pale and handsome he was, but, hardening her heart, she said, "Well, good Gilles, have you found new arguments to persuade me into starvation?"

But de Mercadet said eagerly, "There will be no need of that now, I think, for I have thought of someone who may help us by simpler means."

"Do not suggest a smithy again," said Jehane.

"When I was in Perpignan I taught something of my art to young Charles de Gaucelm, in whose father's house I lived for a certain time. I taught him to make an alba, to hold his own in a tenson, and how to improve his playing on the lute. For this he was grateful, as you may well imagine, and since he was adored by all that household, all that household competed with him in gratitude and still would be willing to do much for me. It was none of their fault that I left Perpignan.

"Now there is in the house an old nurse whose wisdom in leech-craft and skill in herbs are indeed remarkable. She was born in Brittany, and she learnt her secrets there. Among her most notable cures was that of a certain dowager countess whose breath grew insufficient on account of her fatness."

"What has that to do with me?" said Jehane. "I can breathe well enough."

"The old nurse paid no attention to the countess's breath," said de Mercadet, "but she gave her a certain medicine which removed her fat."

"Oh," said Jehane.

"In three or four weeks the countess was slender as a girl, and this without inconvenience to herself."

"She was not forbidden to eat?"

"Her appetite grew better and she ate more heartily every day," said Mercadet.

Jehane took another sugar-plum. "You are going to see the old woman, to buy her medicine?"

"It will be neither pleasant nor safe for me to return to Perpignan," said de Mercadet, "but I count it a small adventure when your love waits for my return. Ah, Jehane, when your belt falls, how will our sadness fall! What joy will be loosed when your chain is loosed, and rapture, not steel, may gird you!"

Jehane said little to that. She was rather thoughtful, and, as usual, not quite sure where her thoughts tended. But she gave de Mercadet permission to leave the castle on his errand, and before he went, kissed him on the mouth. The troubadour's soul was exalted by this warm and freely given kiss, but in truth it meant little. It simply concealed the fact that she did not know what to say to him.

It was October when de Mercadet rode with his joglar from the castle of Caraman. Christmas came, and he did not return. Winter passed, and there was no news of him.

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Jehane thought less about him now, though with increasing frequency she thought about his errand, and the Breton medicine appeared infinitely desirable, for the coldness of winter had sharpened her appetite and the chain, in consequence, had grown somewhat tight about her waist. She desired most fervently to be rid of it, and that without any thought of love as a sequel to freedom.

Spring was ripening into summer before de Mercadet came back to Caraman. He rode in one evening, travel-stained and weary. But though the vagaries of the weather had taken the colour out of his clothes, they had put colour in his cheeks, and he looked both strong and well contented with what he had done. He walked with a jaunty air and spoke in a ringing tone. Jehane grew uneasy when she saw his confidence, but very soon she asked if he had the medicine with him.

"And why have you been so long on your journey?" she said. "Perpignan is not so far that a man needs half a year to go there and come back."

De Mercadet laughed. "I have the medicine," he said, "and I've been to Brittany for it. I lived there in a fisherman's house, breathing the smell of fish and living on haddock and black bread, till winter passed and the roads were fit to ride on again. Would you do so much for me, Madame Jehane?

"No? Wait till you have heard the songs I made riding south in the rain and sun to see you, and when you hear the least of them you will be fast in love and deep in love and ready to say yes to anything I ask."

"Let me see the medicine," said Jehane.

"Hear my songs first," said Gilles.

And he sang, till midnight came, the loveliest songs he had ever made, and all the ladies were ready to die for him, and the gentlemen would not let him stop, and at every door were servants, hoarsely breathing, thrusting in their heads to hear this wealth of verse and melody. But Jehane, feeling the belt tight around her waist, thought crossly that he might have given her the medicine first.

She got it on the following day. "What is it, and how is it made?" she asked.

"It is prepared from a certain kind of seaweed that grows in Brittany," said Gilles. "They burn it in pits on the shore, and from the ash it is possible to extract this medicine, though the secret is known to few. But the old nurse at Perpignan, whose own store had all been used, sent me to a sister who shares her cunning, and she gave me this flask."

"It will do me no harm?" asked Jehane.

"None," said Gilles.

Then Jehane took her first dose, and made a wry face after it, but filled her mouth with a sugar-plum to take away the bitterness.

In two weeks' time she was slimmer than she had been for months, and after another week the chain hung loosely down on her hips. She was greatly pleased by this, but less contented to observe de Mercadet's growing exultation, and to hear each evening a serena

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inspired by the pleasures which he anticipated with increasing confidence.

She preferred his old mood of melancholy, and a year of continence had made her so used to it that she felt an extreme reluctance to bother herself with the untidiness of love, the heat and proximity of a lover.

The morning came when the diminished ambit of her hips was no more than an inch or two greater than the circumference of the confining belt. In great excitement she wriggled and twisted and thrust down the links. They were slow to overpass her hinder plumpness, but after some more squeezing, kneading, and pushing, they fell clear, with a rattle and chink, and lay loosely about her ankles.

With a cry of delight Jehane leapt over them, threw out her arms, capered and bent and shook herself in the ecstasy of release. Truly light-hearted, she became almost light-headed with joy. She was sobered only by the obtrusive thought of her obligation to de Mercadet. She grew resentful then, to think that the perfection of her happiness should be so impaired. She sulked, she looked out of the window, frowning.

She was, it happened, in the tower room where she had said good-bye to her husband. By leaning far out of the window—it was just broad enough to let her shoulders go through—she could almost see her image in the green moat beneath her. But she was not dressed for leaning out of windows, and hurriedly she withdrew her head.

There was a mirror in the room, and she saw that slimness truly suited her. She had not looked so lovely for years. She turned this way and that, and with shame for her meagre gratitude admitted what she owed to de Mercadet. He had restored her freedom and renewed her beauty.

What a pity that he wanted a reward. And how deplorably his manner had changed from that attractive melancholy air. Ah, if only she desired to love! If love were not so rude and overwhelming! And yet he deserved reward, and generosity would suit her best in bestowing it.

But he must give her time. He must be content with seeing her and singing to her. He must not be roughly importunate. She would talk to him and tell him so, and promise her love for some day next year, or the year after. She herself was not impatient for embraces, so why should he be in a hurry?

Having come to this decision Jehane dressed herself, called for a page, and bade him find the troubadour and request his presence in the tower room.

She waited him calmly. But Gilles came in with exultant laughter, saw the discarded chain immediately, and bearing down her protesting hands, caught her in his arms and hugged her with alarming vigour. He was in a rollicking mood and it seemed to Jehane as though he meant to claim his reward on the spot.

She was extremely irritated by his jocular manner, and repulsed

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him sharply. Had he wept, had he fallen to his knees, had he sought her with a melancholy hope and humble passion, it would have been easy to be kind—kind and yet firm. But that he should canvass her love with hilarity was abominable.

"Let go, Gilles! Take your hands away! Stand back from me!" she cried.

"Ah, little prude!" he said. "Have I not waited long enough? What hinders now?"

"Don't come near me," cried Jehane.

"Little prude!" he cried. "Bed is the place for little prudes, and the place for me. Come, sweeting, to bed, to bed!"

Jehane was horrified. Hands out to ward him off, she backed away from him, round the room and round again, and Gilles followed close, laughing loudly, calling her miser's money, wild bees' honey, and little prude.

Round the room they went again, but as Jehane re-passed the window she stopped suddenly with a cry different from her protesting cries. She forgot de Mercadet, she stood motionless, and stared in a white silence at what she saw. His exuberance dulled, de Mercadet came quietly behind her and looked over her shoulder.

He saw two men crossing the river at the ford, a few hundred paces from the castle gates. One wore the white surcoat of the Temple, but the red cross on it was faded to a dull and lifeless hue. They drew nearer, and rode in across the lowered drawbridge.

Jehane ran to the opposite window, that looked into the courtyard. It filled with clamour as the horsemen rode in and were surrounded by twenty, thirty, forty people shouting and begging for news.

"Do you know these men?" asked Gilles.

"One is my husband's squire," she said, and spoke in a queer breathless voice.

They waited uncomfortably, saying nothing, and heard him climbing the tower stairs. He came in. He was a boy in years, but older than his years, brown-faced, and with a certain grimness stamped on his youth.

"Where is he, Piers?" asked Jehane. "My lord, I mean. Your lord and mine, Piers?"

"Have courage, madame," he answered. "The Knights Templar never showed more gloriously. It was at Damietta. We were the first to attack and the last to retreat. But for us the Christian army had been destroyed."

"He is dead?"

"Yes, madame."

"Ah, God, God!" she cried, and for a little while stood blank of face while the grim young squire told his story. Then she said, "Tell me again, for I did not hear you."

When he had told the whole tale again, he fumbled in a pouch, found a key tied to a cord, and gave it to Jehane.

"My lord took that from his neck a little time before he died," he said, "and bade me bring it home to you."

Jehane took the key and wept, wildly at first and with great sobs.

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The squire left her then, being given leave, and de Mercadet stood silent. But after a while he said softly, "Love lives, though many die."

Jehane looked at the key. "Go now," she said, "and leave me alone. I must be alone," she repeated, and thrust de Mercadet to the door.

"I also will say a prayer," he said.

Jehane sat for a long time, holding the key in her hand, and many thoughts came into her head, but into her heart came slowly a feeling that, she was horrified to find, seemed very like relief. Shocked by this discovery, she conjured up a picture of Bertran on their wedding day, another of Bertran bleeding to death at Damietta, and contrived to squeeze out a few more tears. But they came reluctantly.

Only under the shock of foreign news, the sudden wound made by the word of death, had the fountain of misery truly opened, and now its small store was shed. For though she had loved Bertran once, her love had not flourished since he tried to make it prisoner and lock it up; and so she thought of his death coolly enough when the shock of its announcement had passed. But she did not like to admit this, even to herself, and preferred to think she was truly grief-stricken and most tragically bereaved.

And now came creeping a cunning thought, a sly round-the-corner thought, that here, in new widowhood, was an excuse for getting rid of de Mercadet.

"How dare he talk of love at such a time as this," she thought. "Grief for poor Bertran is my only interest now, and little Aélis orphaned now!"

She sniffed and sighed, and three small tears fell slowly. The key was pressed between her hands.

"To send it back was a kind and noble thought," she cried, "but how lonely and insecure it makes me feel to have it."

And then she thought, "It is my duty to requite that last kindness, and if I sacrifice my liberty again it will be well requited—I can be as noble as you, Bertran—and also I should feel secure again, and Gilles can fret and plead as he pleases then. But that is not why I shall do it. I shall do it to show my grief for Bertran's death. And Gilles can think what he likes."

The next day de Mercadet came to talk with her in the room in the tower. She said, "You have served me well in your love for me, Gilles, and I had not meant to leave you unrewarded. But now this news has come that drives love from my heart, and all joy from this castle, and our love is no longer possible. Bertran's death made it impossible, and I have made it doubly impossible."

"What have you done?" he asked.

"My lord sent me a key to unlock the belt he clasped me with. As things have come about, there was no need for that. And yet I have made use of the key."

"You have put on the belt again?"

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" I put it on again, and pulled it tight, and locked it," said Jehane, " and now I have no more need of the key."

She went to that window that overlooked the moat, and threw it out. They heard the tiny splash it made as it struck the water.

" You did that because of the great love you had for your husband? You did it in sorrow, renouncing the joys of this world ? "

" Yes," said Jehane.

De Mercadet laughed. " Little liar ! Little prude ! " he said. " Yes, weep if you like, for your tears mean little enough to you and nothing at all to me. Yet I do not bear you ill will. Not now. Were I as other men I might, but I am not like other men. For I am a poet.

" Other men would complain at spending a barren year in your service, but my year has not been barren, for I have made some good songs. It often happens that the women for whom one writes the best poetry do least to deserve it—but what does that matter ? The poems are there, and will serve to praise and thank less prudent ladies, whose kindness comes so quickly there is no time to write well in their honour.

" Were it not for prudes like you, little prude, the generous ones would scarce get a verse at all to praise their sweet lips and lovely eyes. This most wise thought came suddenly to me in the night—for I guessed what you might be doing—and so I bear you no ill will, for you have done me no wrong.

" But neither do I love you, Jehane. My love was put away in the cupboard for too long, and when you cracked it I found it was like a rotten nut. There was nothing in it, Jehane.

" So do not eat too much, for the old woman's medicine is done and I shall not be at your service another year to ride to Brittany."

Having uttered this rude and abominable speech, de Mercadet took leave of Jehane, made speedy preparations for departure, and a little after noon rode out of the castle, singing as he went, to the scandalizing and horror of all who heard him.

Nor did Jehane ever see him again, though for the rest of that year he lived in the castle of Hauterive, that was no more than forty miles away. And there he sang again the songs he had made for Jehane, and had by them great honour, and also, it is said, the favour of the Lady Saill, who dwelt there.

And one day de Mercadet was talking to a soldier on guard at the gate when a bowman, a mercenary from Italy, came and asked if he could find employment there, for he had just been thrown out of the castle of Caraman for drunkenness—though he had not been so much drunk as smitten with a sudden fever, he explained. De Mercadet asked him what news he had from Caraman.

" The Lady Jehane has been out of sorts this last week or two," said the archer. " She is a lady who likes to eat well—and who shall blame her for that ?—and now whenever she takes a heavy meal she experiences, it is said, a feeling of pressure round her middle. And for that reason she is looking somewhat unhappy.

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"Nor is that all, for she says that she suffered a loss one day while walking by the moat. And the moat has been drained and everybody is paddling in the mud seeking what she let fall there."

"And what was that?" asked de Mercadet.

"A key; a key tied to a piece of cord," said the archer.

* * *

*ANSWERS to A MASQUE OF QUEENS on page* 10

1. *Queen Flavia, wife of Rudolf of Ruritania, who was in love with Rudolf Rassendyll, in "The Prisoner of Zenda," by Anthony Hope.*
2. *Baptista, the Player Queen, who stirred the uneasy conscience of Gertrude, in "Hamlet," by William Shakespeare.*
3. *The Queen of Elfland, who carried off True Thomas in the ballad attributed to Thomas of Erceldoune, "Thomas the Rhymer."*
4. *The Queen of Hearts in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," by Lewis Carroll.*
5. *The Queen in "The Eagle Has Two Heads," by Jean Cocteau, English adaptation by Ronald Duncan.*
6. *Alice, the Queen o' the May, in the poem, "The May Queen," by Alfred Tennyson.*
7. *Queen Jemima in "The Apple Cart," by George Bernard Shaw.*
8. *The Snow Queen, in the fairy-tale of that title by Hans Andersen.*
9. *Gloriana, "Queene of Faerie lond" in the epic poem, "The Faerie Queene," by Edmund Spenser.*

* * *

## ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD

You will find, on page 144, Argosy's first Prize Crossword Competition in which there will be one-guinea book tokens for the first three correct solutions checked on the closing date. When you have completed the crossword puzzle *in ink*, please write your name and address in capital letters in the space below the square and cut out together the square and attached coupon.

Post your entry to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 1, 3, Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4. (Comp.) to arrive not later than Tuesday, June 9, the closing date.

We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final.

Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale Aug. 10.

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# TO CHELSEA

**Go with old Thames, view Chelsea's glorious pile . . .**

SAMUEL ROGERS

My way is this: I leave my best gown and periwig at Mrs. Vanhomrigh's, then walk up the Pall Mall, through the Park, out at Buckingham House, and so to Chelsea a little beyond the church. I set out about sunset, and get here in something less than an hour: it is two good miles, and just 5,748 steps.

JONATHAN SWIFT, *Journal to Stella, May* 15, 1710

## *Chelsea Old Church*

*It is the Lawrence family . . . who are called "The Hillyars" by Henry Kingsley; and his preference—a memory, no doubt, of the Sunday visits of his boyhood to the rector's pew, which directly faces these tombs—refers to that quaint monument in the Lawrence chapel; where under a little arch, supported by columns, kneel wife and husband face to face, he in his armour, his three simple-seeming sons in ruffs kneeling behind him; she in her heavy stiff dress, her six daughters on their knees behind in a dutiful row, decreasing in size to the two dead while yet babies on the cushion before her.*

BENJAMIN MARTIN, *Old Chelsea*

## *Cheyne Row*

We are called Cheyne Row (pronounced Chainie Row), and are a genteel neighbourhood. The street is flag-paved, sunk-storied, iron-railed, all old-fashioned and tightly done up. The house itself is eminent, antique, wainscoted to the very ceiling, and has all been new painted and repaired; broadish stairs with massive balustrades (in the old style) corniced and as thick as one's thigh; floors thick as a rock, wood of them here and there worm-eaten, yet capable of cleanness, and still with thrice the strength of a modern floor.

Our row, which for the last three doors or so is a street, and none of the noblest, runs out upon a "Parade" (perhaps they call it) running along the shore of the river, a broad highway with huge shady trees, boats lying moored, and a smell of shipping and tar. Battersea Bridge (of wood) a few yards off; the broad

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river with white-trowsered, white-shirted Cockneys dashing by like arrows in their long canoes of boats; beyond the green beautiful knolls of Surrey with their villages—on the whole a most artificial green-painted, yet lively, fresh, almost opera-looking business, such as you can fancy. Chelsea is a singular heterogeneous kind of spot, very dirty, and confused in some places, quite beautiful in others abounding in antiquities and the traces of great men—Sir Thomas More, Steele, Smollett, etc. Finally, Chelsea abounds more than any place in omnibi, and they take you to Coventry Street for sixpence.

THOMAS CARLYLE *to Mrs. Carlyle*, 1834

## *Chelsea Buns*

*O flour of the ovens! A zephyr in paste!*
*Fragrant as honey and sweeter in taste!*
*Hail to the bellman, who sings as he runs,*
*"Smoking hot, piping hot, Chelsea buns!"*

*Prelates, and princes, and lieges, and kings,*
*Hail for the bellman, who tinkles and sings,*
*Bouche of the highest and lowliest ones,*
*"Smoking hot, piping hot, Chelsea buns!"*

*Like the home of your birth, or the scent of a flower,*
*Or the blush of the morning on field or bower,*
*There's a charm in the sound which nobody shuns,*
*Of "Smoking hot, piping hot, Chelsea buns!"*

*Author Unknown*

## *Queen's Elm*

Queen Elizabeth, walking out attended by Lord Burleigh, being overtaken by a heavy shower of rain found shelter under an elm tree. After the rain was over the Queen said, "Let this henceforth be called the Queen's Tree." The tradition is strongly supported by the parish records of Chelsea, as mention is made in 1586 (the 28th of Elizabeth, and probably the year of the occurrence) of a tree situated about this spot, "at the end of the Duke's Walk," as "The Queen's Tree," around which an arbour was built, or, in other words, nine young elm trees were planted by one Bostocke, at the charge of the parish.

T. CROFTON CROKER,
*A Walk from London to Fulham*, 1896

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## *Chelsea China*

To be sold by auction, by Mr. Burnsall, on the premises, some time in March next at the Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory. Everything in general belonging to it, and all the remaining unfinished pieces, glazed and unglazed; some imperfect enamelled ditto of the useful and ornamental, all the materials, the valuable and extensive variety of fine models in wax . . . the mills, kilns, and iron presses, etc., etc. And as Mr. Spimont, the sole possessor of this rare porcelain secret, is advised to go to the German Spaw, all his genuine household furniture will be sold at the same time.

*From an advertisement*, 1764

## *Pastoral*

*When the sweet-breathing spring unfolds the buds,*
*Love flies the dusty town for shady woods;*
*Then Chelsea's meads o'erhear perfidious vows,*
*And the press'd grass defrauds the grazing cows.*

JOHN GAY

## *Royal Hospital*

1791. Dr. Burney at this time resided entirely at Chelsea College; and he found his sojourn so perfectly to his taste, that . . . he never wished to exchange the place of his abode. The distance from town was just sufficient to avoid its bustle, its smoke, its dust, and its noise; yet not enough to impede any evening engagement, as it was not above an hour's walk, and consequently half an hour's drive to Piccadilly. Operas, concerts, conversaziones, were all within reach of his time, when without destruction to his health. And Chelsea air is even proverbially salubrious, Doctors Arbuthnot, Sloane, Mede, Cadogan, etc., having given it a medical celebrity by making it their chosen residence.

FANNY BURNEY

## *Doggett's Badge*

*This being the day of His Majesty's happy accession to the throne there will be given by Mr. Doggett an orange colour livery with a badge representing Liberty to be rowed for by six watermen that are out of their time within the year past. They are to row from London Bridge to Chelsea. It will be continued annually on the same day forever.*

*Notice on London Bridge, August* 1, 1716

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# SUNSET OF THE MAMMOTH

**In this remote valley the final act of a titanic drama was drawing to a close**

## by R. W. KREPPS

IN the least-known region of continental Alaska, beyond the barrier of a hoary mountain range, lies the valley. It is one of those strange, hidden patches of earth that used to be called " fur pockets."

Shut off on the west by the great snow-shrouded range, and on the east by a lower scarp of glacier-hacked rock, it forms a long, green-brown, oblong patch about the size of an English county. Access to it may be had through either end, with some difficulty; or from the air.

If Indians ever found it, they have left no trace behind them. It is not, however, virgin soil; not unexplored. In the early years of this century, a Yukon prospector turned trapper came through the grove of balsam poplar that masks the lower entrance, hid his sledge (which was later torn to pieces by wolves, who ate the leather fittings), and took his dogs over the ragged chine of rubble into the valley, where he set out a line of traps for sable marten. For a long time his skull, gnawed and polished by a family of brown bears, lay caught in the roots of an old dead willow; it may be there yet.

His dogs went wild, fought, hunted, watched their numbers grow less, and in time left the valley in a pack, to be swallowed up in the secret fastnesses of the cold country.

Forty-odd years later, another white man found the fur pocket. He read the signs of this ancient tragedy—found bits of the sledge, a rotted cabin with a few poor ruined personal effects not quite mouldered away, and the skull, which he thought it foolish to consider burying at this late date—and, after one trip to Nome to arrange his affairs, he moved in. He built himself a cabin, put out traps of his own, and settled down to stay.

Every four months supplies were flown in, and pelts taken out, by a friend of this man. The plane was an amphibian, and landed on the tiny lake near the bottom of the valley.

The man who lived in the valley was named John Mycroft. The seventh time his friend came in, he brought a passenger: Russ Langan. Me . . .

We crossed the towering range, which stretched from horizon

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to horizon in shining milk-white glory and seemed so formidably boundless as we looked down on it that surely, I thought, it must go on thrusting up its mountains right round the world into infinity. We dropped half a thousand feet, turned at a sharp angle, and flew along the length of the valley. A few miles ahead, the blue-pink splotch of the lake appeared. Shortly, we could see the big wind streaks on its surface, then the ripples, and just before the amphibian was set to land, Dolly Varden trout leaping in the sun.

Kirk brought her smoothly down near the shore. He tugged on hip boots and gave me a pair. We took a box of supplies apiece and waded through bitterly cold water to the beach, which was covered with green spring sedge and the saffron-coloured remains of last year's grass. We made three trips and emptied the plane. Then we sat on the boxes, lighted our pipes and waited.

The air was chill—not bleak, but refreshing—so that after a minute or two we began to walk up and down, stamping our feet and snorting like horses eager for a run.

"Makes you want to set off and stalk a moose or something, doesn't it?" Kirk said. "There's a feel in the breeze like shooting weather."

"Ah," said I, agreeing. I stuck my hands into the pockets of my hunting outfit. It had been expensive when I bought it, and was mellowed by now to a grey and serviceable maturity; over my shoulders I had draped a parka, trimmed with glossy wolverine fur, that I'd borrowed from Kirk.

"So this is the valley," I said. "This is where you saw the big one."

"A couple of miles to the north, yes. I only got a half-second look at it, but my God, it was big! I wasn't more than five hundred feet up and happened to glance down, and there it was, just going into the trees. I tell you, Russ, it looked as broad as an elephant! Near as I can remember, it was reddish-brown, maybe with a black tinge to it, too. It must have been a brown bear, but the most terrific brown bear anybody ever laid eyes on."

"Really big, eh?"

"When I think of the size of that back, big seems a little word."

"I've never shot a brown bear," I said. I'm not very keen on shooting for record heads, but—what a brute this must be! "I hope your friend hasn't got on its tracks yet."

"Here he comes now," Kirk said, nodding inland. "Must have been watching for me. Cooee, John!"

John Mycroft waved an arm above his head. He came up, grounded his rifle butt in the sedge, and looked uncertainly from Kirk to me and back again. "Hello, Kirk," he said.

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"John, this is my brother Russ. I've told you about him."

We shook hands. "Last I heard of you, you were lost in the Congo, Russ," he said.

"I wasn't lost. I was living in a pygmy village."

"And too busy to send word outside for ten months," Kirk said.

"Wasn't busy, either. Simply didn't have anything to say." It was true. I hadn't seen any sense in sending a messenger over the long, dangerous distances of the forest with a letter saying that all was well and I was having a wonderful time. My family is supposed to know I can take care of myself. John Mycroft gazed at me with approval, as though he could sympathize with my attitude.

"You've seen a host of places, Kirk tells me. I'd like to talk with you over a glass or two. Come up to the cabin?"

"John, I can't stay," Kirk said. "I've got a date in Nome tonight." He glanced at me. "But Russ here, if it's O.K. with you, wants to stay a while." He coughed uncomfortably. "Two weeks, if it's O.K., John."

The man's face did not change, yet there was suddenly a reluctance, almost a hostility, in him, that I could feel clearly.

Before he could speak, I said, "You can say no, and I'll fly back with Kirk and no hard feelings. I realize this is your private preserve."

"No, no. I don't own the place. You're welcome. I'll be glad of the company."

"I'm sorry we couldn't give you some notice. It was all on the spur of the moment. Kirk's told me so much about this valley, I felt I had to see it and hunt a little in it. I'm a what-d'you-call-it—a cheechako; I'm new to the country, and you know it down to the last inch. I'd like to team up with you for these two weeks. Any pelts I took would be yours. I don't collect trophies, and they'd be some return for your time."

John Mycroft shook his head irritably, as if the suggestion were dishonest. Leaning on his rifle, he might have been a Kaintuck hunter straight out of Fenimore Cooper. He was nearly as dark as I, but whereas I'm built like a stocky bear, he was long and lean and tough as a panther. He had a sinewy face with raven-wing eyebrows and blue eyes. He was dressed in furs of various kinds, some worn and others lustrously new.

"You're not putting me to any inconvenience. I haven't hunted since the wolves came down last winter. It'll take the stiffness out of my joints. And you've been in Africa," he said. "That clinches it. Happy to have you, and you can tell me all about Africa."

"Fine. But the pelts are yours. I can't agree, otherwise."

"All right, damn it!" There was still, behind his eyes, a queer

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reluctance that had nothing to do with pelts. "If you honestly don't want 'em. What guns did you bring?"

"A .30-'06 and a .375 Magnum."

"Good enough. There's big game to the north."

"That's what Kirk told me. Some of the biggest bears alive."

"I shall have to be on the move," my brother said. "See you in fourteen days." He shook hands with us and waded out to his plane.

"Let's move this gear," John Mycroft said. "Cabin's only a quarter of a mile away. We'll sit around and talk tonight. I want to hear about Africa. Know anything about climatology?"

"Nothing technical. I know it gets hot in the desert and cold in the tundra, and that almost exhausts my knowledge." I shouldered a box and slung my rifles over the other arm. "That's your work, isn't it? Climatology?"

"Yes. I'm an independent, and trap for my expenses. That's why I'm here. This pocket's a sort of phenomenon. By rights, it ought to be permanently frozen halfway down to the core of the world, but it isn't. Any other valley this deep, sheltered by those mountains, would never thaw, even in summer. Yet in February the earth under the snow isn't too hard to turn with a sharp spade. I don't know, it's a funny place. It fascinates me."

We went towards the cabin, and I listened to him with half an ear while I tried to decide what was annoying him. I couldn't place the trouble, but it was there. John Mycroft was hospitable, as men are in the north and in all such lonely places. He was obviously glad to have someone to talk to; his pale, intelligent eyes were friendly when he looked at me. Still, there it was—an aura of uneasiness, a sort of awkward constraint that I could feel under my skin but couldn't draw out into the light. It reminded me of the premonition you feel when there's going to be trouble in Africa. Your flesh crawls now and again, you find yourself looking over your shoulder, you start to sweat, and then at last the drums begin to throb and the trouble is out in the open.

I laughed at myself. There was a less dramatic simile that was nearer the truth. John Mycroft's attitude was almost exactly that of a man who's welcomed a stranger into his house for a fortnight's stay, and has a beautiful wife whom he doesn't quite trust. That was it. The emotion I could feel in Mycroft was as near as could be to jealousy.

He seemed to like me well enough, he looked forward to some good hunter's talk, he wanted to show me this pet valley of his, and yet he was a little jealous of it. He'd have liked to keep it inviolate, all to himself, his virgin vale behind the ranges. Poor

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devil! It had been impudent of me to come in without notifying him first.

The cabin was small and neatly made, with a meat safe jutting out beside the door. Six or seven Malemutes, heavy grey beasts with plenty of wolf in their lineage, lolled nearby. They were not tied, and came, stiff-legged and suspicious, to greet me.

"Gently, gently," Mycroft said. I put out my free hand, knuckles foremost, and the dogs sniffed at it one by one. Then they fell back to let us pass.

That night we drank golden Scotch from one of the bottles I had brought, and the talk was exciting and full of past adventures. We ranged over the world together, shooting lions, stalking stags, galloping stallions down through remembered gorges, walking untold miles for a glimpse of sunrise on the veld; we spoke of animals and men, and of places where nothing that lived would ever meet the eye. Nearly-forgotten words came to our tongues, words to call up beauty or violence for one another's edification.

We had both been lucky enough to live the sort of life we enjoyed best, each of us free-lancing, myself as a writer and professional hunter, Mycroft as a climatologist and explorer. Liking each other more and more, we talked and smoked till our briars were soggy and bitter; and Mycroft reached for an old clay, while I rummaged in my kit and brought out my pet pipe, a little white fellow whose barrel-shaped bowl was lined with thin beaten steel.

John Mycroft raised his eyebrows, "That's an unusual one."

"It's Yakut." I handed it over. "Siberian Indian. Made of fossil mammoth ivory."

"Is it, by God!" He smoothed his finger tips over the bowl. "Like satin. It could be top-grade elephant ivory."

"Well—in a sense, it is. Although this elephant was hairy and preferred a cold climate, and his tusks curled like a Manchu mandarin's nails. The old boy that grew this tusk may have died half a million years ago, or only a very few thousand. Nobody can ever know. That's part of the fascination of the piece." I took it and filled the bowl with tobacco. "I keep it by me wherever I go, to remind me that a man is pretty small beer, after all."

He agreed with that, and we talked for a while about mammoth ivory. I told him there had been a trade in it for centuries, beginning with the Greeks and Romans. We talked about the whole animals preserved in ice that are found in the north even yet, on which Indians will occasionally feed their families for entire winters. I mentioned that I'd like to try a quick-frozen mammoth steak. He looked rather lofty at that.

"Great shaggy monarchs of the earth!" he said. He was

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perhaps a little drunk. His lean face was flushed brick-red. "Sometimes I picture them roaming the northland, chasing my remote ancestors. I love all great beasts."

I remember how that sentence struck me. "I love all great beasts!" He was a fierce and solitary pagan in that moment, repudiating all his years of hunting, and giving tribute of honour to the monstrous gods that walk among us clothed in fur.

I pressed a layer of ash into the glowing tobacco, and said, "Do you ever wonder if perhaps there are a few mammoths left in the cold places of the world? Don't scoff, damn it! You've speculated on it, one time or another."

He fastened his hard gaze on my face. At last he said, "Well, yes, I admit I have."

"Everyone with imagination has. You can't help it, when you consider how many have been found frozen intact."

"It's proved that they've been dead thousands of—"

"Oh, man, I know that! It's simply that you can't believe in your heart of hearts that any animal still existing in that state of preservation can be wholly extinct. You say to yourself: Why not? You know that plenty of animals living all about you are actually prehistoric. Look at the brown bear. If he isn't the great cave bear, or at least a grandson of that brute, I'll eat him raw. Look at the lizards in Arizona. Look at the monstrosities in Australia."

"Not the same thing. Everyone knows they're still around."

I laughed. "Anyway, you'll admit it's an intriguing idea."

"That the giants still walk the earth. It is a wonderful thought. But a little wild for a stolid climatologist, even when he's inhaled too much *tonga*." He gestured at the whisky bottle, then said, "Let's turn in. It's a long day tomorrow."

Lying awake, I blinked at the roof and mused on John Mycroft. I had never met a man whom I took to more quickly. I looked forward avidly to the next two weeks. He had apparently conquered his aversion to guests, whatever caused it, except perhaps just at the end of our talk. For a breath or so I'd felt discomfort in him. Had it been at the mention of giant bears? I couldn't fasten on it. I laughed at myself and went to sleep, to dream of a brown bear as tall as a maypole and as broad as a barn door.

For a week we hunted, going out every day and following a pattern laid down by my host, working the sides of the valley far northwards till we were nearly in sight of the other end. We talked—how we talked! Of climate trends and Transvaal politics, of the far reaches of the globe and the philosophy of men who live with the outdoors, and always of animals.

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We would get back to the cabin at nine or ten o'clock, as the last of the twilight was vanishing over the range, with our trophies (when we had bagged any) and our joyously tired bodies that ached for rest and food and a glass of something to oil the wheels of more talk. It was as though we had been comrades for half a century.

There was no more hidden reluctance in Mycroft, and already we were planning another hunt for the autumn.

On the ninth day, we went up the east side half a dozen miles to scout for bear spoor. There was a big brownie, Mycroft admitted, that had his den somewhere in the neighbourhood. After an hour or so, we smoked, for my friend said he always did when he was on his trap line and the brutes were used to the scent of tobacco ; and shortly after we lighted our pipes, I killed a big old lone bitch wolf, because Mycroft did not like wolves in his valley. We gave up on the brownie after that, and just loafed along, kicking at the cream-and-white reindeer moss and telling yarns.

" We're not born hunters," I said to him. " We're natural-born talkers, that's our trouble." I stopped and pointed at a birch tree near the path ; the bark had been shredded and hung in strips some six feet above our heads. " Your brownie's been clawing, John. Lord, he's a gigantic devil, isn't he ! "

" One of the biggest I've ever seen. I've had a couple of chances at him but we've managed to keep up a mutual wary respect. I don't mind you having a whack at him, though, if that's what you're going to ask. I'm not protecting him. Just never got the urge to go after him."

" Oh. I wondered about that."

" What ? "

" Well, I knew there was a thundering big something-or-other in the valley. Kirk saw it the last time he flew out. Said he only caught a glimpse of it below the plane, scooting into the woods ; but he could tell the creature was enormous. A phrase he used in his letter stuck in my mind. He said it was as big as an elephant, as a hairy elephant. I realized it must be a grandfather brownie, and I yearned for a shot at him. Then, when I came in, I got the impression that you were guarding something pretty jealously, and I guessed it was the big bear. So I didn't mention it."

" That was decent of you, Russ. I didn't know it showed. I suppose I've lived here alone too long. I admit to a certain uncomfortable feeling at first. *My* valley ! Like an old woman with a bunch of pet cats."

" You don't care, then, if we try for the bruin ? "

" No ! Not now. Not since I know you."

" Good. We'll sneak up again tomorrow, then."

We went home to the cabin, and everything seemed quite all

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right ; but that evening I could have sworn that trouble was coming. All it would take was a word. I chewed it over in my mind, wondering rather desperately what the word might be. I still thought it might be " bear." Would John pretend to help me search for the big fellow, while actually steering me away from its haunts ? I knew him well by now ; he was no liar, yet if he had conceived a sort of lorn pagan admiration for the animal, as could have happened to a man cut off from his fellows for so long, then he was capable of lying from hell to midnight to protect the brute. " *I love all great beasts,*" he'd said.

For three days we hunted the bear, and did not find him ; and on the fourth day, which was the thirteenth of my stay in the valley, a cold, sleeting rain came in that all but destroyed the hunting prospects. We endured four or five hours of it, then made for the cabin, where we cooked a couple of ptarmigan and some sweet-fleshed grayling, gorged ourselves despondently, and lay about smoking and swearing until bedtime.

The early Alaskan dawn, lifting on a world of clear-skied splendour, found us well on our way to the brownie's home grounds. Each of us carried a .30-'06. We cast about for a while and then found where a big animal had been browsing on sedge near an alder-shaded creek.

" He hasn't been out of hibernation more than a few weeks," John Mycroft said. " He's still hungry for anything."

" Including us. Here's his print in the wet moss. What a monster ! Let's go."

The trail took us north, away from the creek and across a smooth glacis to a crest that overlooked meadows patched with balsam poplar. Here we plucked handfuls of dead saffron grass and tossed them up to test the wind. There was almost no movement in the air, which was clean and bright with sun. We worked down the slope and across the meadows, heading now towards the snow-cowled range through country I had not seen before that morning.

Mycroft found a great hole dug by the nine-inch claws of the brown bear.

" After a ground squirrel. Got him, too."

We passed on and came to the narrow backbone of a moraine—earth and boulders and sharp-edged rock debris discarded by some long-vanished glacier. Ten yards apart, we made our way up to the top, which was ridged with a line of brush standing stiff, like a crude fence, between meadow and meadow. The bear had gone over the spine of the moraine, smashing a gap in the brush fence ; I crawled up to this breach, while Mycroft, off to my right, parted the shrubs with his rifle and his bare hands.

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Before us lay a natural amphitheatre, a huge oval of earth carpeted with green sphagnum moss and ringed by spruce woods in tiers on higher ground, like a gallery ; behind it, for a back-drop, rose the mighty range. I think I must have gasped at the symmetrical beauty of this colossal arena even before my eyes fell on the single actor upon its stage. I focused my astounded gaze on it and my mouth dropped open and my whole body began to shake—to tremble with wonder. It was as though the sane core of my mind fell back a little and observed me lying there among the bushes, bereft now of all reason, the poor idiot body quivering in the grip of an astonishment that was closely akin to terror.

Indeed, the beast was red-brown with here and there a blackish tone to it, as Kirk had said. The hair was so long that in some places it nearly touched the turf, especially that of the chest and shoulders, which fell like a thick, straight cascade of mane. It stood full fourteen feet at its highest point, which was a bulky hump behind the neck ; its ears were heavily furred, and its little bright eyes gleamed and blinked in the roan shag of its head. The titanic body sloped off sharply towards the tail. The legs were massive, like tree trunks.

It was just on the fringe of the woods to my right, breaking off twigs of spruce and putting them into its mouth with the delicately questing tip of its trunk. Monstrous ivory tusks, all cream and sleek, thrust out on either side of the trunk and swept up in three-quarter-circle curves, with an outward writhe to them that left the tips far out to left and right of the great head ; so lightly were they carried, so graceful were their curlings and perfectly proportioned their tapering thickness, that it was almost impossible to believe that they must weigh hundreds of pounds apiece.

Grotesque, enormous, unthinkable, the last mammoth browsed quietly on the tender twigs of the spruce forest.

After an incalculable period during which I lost all sense of time, I came back to myself, closed my gaping mouth, shook my head and pushed the rifle forward from beneath my arm. I pointed the muzzle in the general direction of the mammoth and just touched the trigger, but I didn't sight the weapon.

My long-fixed hunter's craving to shoot, to bring down that magnificent trophy, was overborne and destroyed. There was a passionate compulsion in me to do nothing, to interfere in no way whatsoever with this unique being.

I suppose it was half conscience and half old Irish superstition. I knew without any doubt that the beast was the last of its race, alive by inconceivable combinations of chance and luck and providence. I could no more have shot it than I could have destroyed the last song in the world, or burned the last book.

I kept the .30-'06 aimed down at the amphitheatre, because it

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would be a great thing to brag that I had once had a mammoth under my sights; but I took my finger from the trigger, to lie watching the primæval elephant at its feeding.

I didn't give John Mycroft more than a swift single thought, and certainly I had forgotten the bear we had been following. Of course Mycroft had known of this miracle, had been worried and jealous and fearful that I would come on it by accident. The act was done now and I felt that Mycroft would be reconciled to it. Then I forgot him entirely. I lay on the narrow moraine between the stiff bushes and filled my eyes and my heart—yes, and even, it seemed, my belly—with the shattering spectacle of the mammoth.

It passed from tree to tree along the edge of the wood, moving as an African elephant does, with a kind of ponderously graceful, drifting gait, like a weighty shadow. The gleam of its ivory against the green peat was bizarre and impossibly grand. To see it was to gaze down measureless corridors of the centuries and glimpse for a moment the golden youth of the mammalian world, when a hundred million giants such as this one had clashed their tusks from Spain to the Arctic Circle.

I did not know, I could not guess, why it was alive, where it had come from or where it had lived during the century or so of civilization in Alaska. Perhaps it had been here all along. Perhaps its remote forbears had crossed the land bridge from Asia and settled here in the valley, to die out gradually in pride and loneliness. I did not theorize long or consciously. The existence of the beast was enough to satisfy me.

At last, the mammoth moved in among the trees and disappeared.

I sighed, shuddered from scalp to heel, wiped the clammy sweat from my face with numbed fingers, and rolled on my side. John Mycroft was standing ten feet away, his rifle trained on my breast.

We remained so for a second or two; and then he lowered his rifle. "Well," he said, "that's that."

I sat up. "You were going to shoot me," I said.

He nodded, started to speak, and then threw up the weapon and fired twice. Astonished beyond measure, I had flung myself on my own gun and raised it before I realized that he had shot above my head. I rolled and got to my knees, and there was a mountain of tawny brown fur hanging over me.

I contracted my body like a salmon attempting a waterfall, and heaved myself down the rocky slope of the moraine; somehow I kept hold of the rifle, even when my face smashed into the rubble and became all a fiery flame. Twisting over, I shot almost straight up as the brownie passed me, hitting it a maddening blow in the guts more by chance than design.

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It turned from Mycroft, who was firing away methodically; and I put a bullet into its chest.

We were like pygmies darting needles into a gorilla, but suddenly the huge bear halted, bloody slaver flying from its gaping jaws; it swayed, a monarch assassinated who could not realize the fact of his death. The head sank below the shoulders, the terrible incisors ground once, and the body that was now warm dead meat swung round and fell across the spine of ragged brush.

I stood, very shaky in the knees, and went up to John Mycroft. We looked at the vast hulk of the brown bear.

"Big old devil," Mycroft said. "Almost a record, I'd say. Never knew a brownie to charge on his hind legs," he added irrelevantly. "Queer—he must have been close to us all the time, and we never heard him or scented him. Hell of a stink."

"You were going to shoot me," I said again, stupidly.

Without answering, he led me down to a stream of icy water, and began to wash the rock dust out of my face and clean off the blood. At last, he said, "Yes, I was."

The shock of the water had brought me to rationality. "I don't think you would've really. If you wanted your secret kept that badly, all you had to do was let the brownie take two more steps—and I'd have been red rags."

"That was afterwards. Don't get sentimental ideas. You're my friend, but in that one moment, with the hunter's soul shining in your eyes, I would have killed you." He frowned, probing gently at a cut with a wet handkerchief. "I meant you to see the mammoth today, Russ. Damn it, what good's a friend if you aren't sure you can trust him to the limit?"

"And you didn't know about me."

"I didn't know about anyone but myself. Nobody ever does. I wanted to know. And then, at the last second, when your finger was on the trigger, I realized I'd shoot you if I had to, to save him." His dark cheeks reddened. "Let's drop it. Are you thinking I ought to tell the world about him?"

"No," I said. "Ouch! Go easy."

"I'm a scientist," he said harshly, trying to justify a situation that needed no justification with me. "If two score of 'em came with their calipers and notebooks to pester the poor brute to death, they couldn't collect half the facts I've got on him. All they could do would be to make a vulgar display of him."

We went up to the bear again and set about skinning it. After a little, Mycroft began to say something, and I interrupted him: "If you're going to give me a rigmarole about your glorious destiny as keeper of the last mammoth, you can sit on it. I know all the

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things you want to say. Here in this valley the final act of a titanic drama is coming to its close, while everyone else in the world believes it ended in the mists of prehistory. The Sunset of the Mammoth! You intend to watch it to its crashing finale, and to watch it alone. You want to live with this beast that by rights should be ten thousand years dead, to have a little of his lonely glory rub off on you. If the wish is selfish, it's at least sublimely selfish. In your place I'd do just what you're doing. So stop trying to explain yourself to me." I patted the gigantic head of the great brown bear. "We'll show this to Kirk and tell him it's what he saw." Then I asked, "Can I come back in the autumn? Or do you still resent me?"

He made a harsh sound in his throat. "You've spoiled me for a hermit." Then, grinning, he reached out a hard brown hand. "Welcome to the brotherhood of shaggy-elephant-keepers," he said.

We shook hands across the carcass of the bear, staring into each other's eyes.

Then our comfortable laughter rang out over the meadow and through the spruce woods, to die away in the distances of the secret valley that lies beyond the glittering range.

* * *

## *WHAT'S YOURS?*

A man who represented a very powerful magnate of the theatre—George Dance—had occasion to go down to Reading to have an argument with Milton Bode, the theatre-owner, over some contracts. He reached the theatre and from the noise issuing therefrom concluded that some sort of major riot had broken out and that the rebels had taken it as their headquarters and were in conflict with the police. It turned out to be Mr. Bode giving instructions as to the laying of some linoleum.

The interview took place, in the form of a terrific row, and when it was over and agreement reached, Bode decided that his antagonist must come to lunch—"at the farm"—he had a farm and also a very lovely house. So the pair went off. Going down the street Bode said, "Better have a drink, eh?" His companion agreed, it had been thirsty work that argument!

Bode turned into a chemist's. "I've got a cold," he said. "I'm going to have an ammoniated tincture of quinine. What's yours?"

W. Macqueen-Pope, *Shirtfronts and Sables*

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# To The Queen

HOW she must long for quiet, to whom comes never
Swan-feathered solitude, and silences moth-soft
Stealing like sleep upon the tired senses . . .
Long to put off the pomp that girds her ever,
And gather all the swift
Immortal years of childhood, to cherish laughter
As mothers will, when childhood is fordone.
She is so young to have been matched with greatness
And set in the seat of kings, bearing hereafter
The burden of a crown.
In maypole mood, yet all in a rush of wonder,
We turn in love to our Queen : this is her hour.
Water-cool and lovely as any lady in legend,
To the world she is symbol of Britain's timeless splendour,
Of all our hopes, the flower.

MARGARET RHODES

*E ye of the garden, queen of flowers,*
*L ove's cup wherein lie nectar's powers,*
*I ngender'd first of nectar ;*
*S weet nurse-child of the spring's young hours,*
*A nd beauty's fair character.*
*B est jewel that the earth doth wear,*
*E v'n when the brave young sun draws near,*
*T o her not love pretending.*
*H imself likewise like form doth bear,*
*A t rising and descending.*
*R ose of the Queen of Love beloved,*
*E ngland's great kings, divinely moved,*
*G ave roses in their banner ;*
*I t show'd that beauty's rose indeed.*
*N ow in this age should them succeed,*
*A nd reign in more sweet manner.*

SIR JOHN DAVIES, 1569–1626

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**ARGOSY**
**presents**

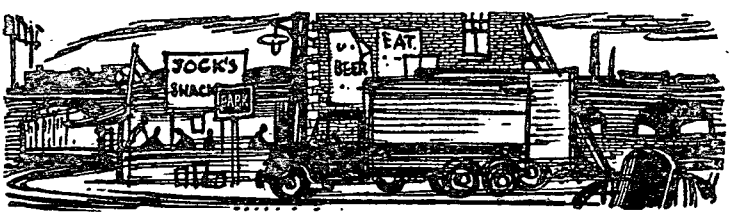
★

# SCHOOL FOR DANGER

★

**by MICHAEL GILBERT**

**First publication of**
**a gripping new novel**
**to be serialized by Argosy**
**in Four Parts**

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# THE FIRST PART

*of Michael Gilbert's exciting new novel. Author of "Smallbone Deceased" and other thrillers, this clever lawyer creates the commonplace facade of a shabby London street and shrewdly reveals the evidences of crime that lurk in the shadows. This is London—the London of the South Bank, vivid with Cockney life, and tense with danger and adventure.*

WHEN Wilfrid Wetherall learned that the boys called him "Wellington" Wetherall he was not displeased. He was an admirer of the Duke, and he had no doubt that it was his references to this hero in the course of his history lessons that had planted the idea. A headmaster had to have a nickname. It could have been a good deal worse.

There were physical resemblances, too, in the bony structure of his face, the jut of his nose, the spare frame and forward bending carriage. It finished there. Nobody, not even Wetherall himself, imagined that he had the Wellingtonian character; useful though it would have been in the daily difficulties which beset the headmaster of an understaffed, over-populated Secondary Day School for Boys in the South-East of London.

Miss Donovan came in from the Administration Office across the passage. It should perhaps be made clear that the Administration Office was an even smaller room than Mr. Wetherall's study and had been originally designed—the matter was uncertain—either as a very small extra staff room or a very large cloakroom. Miss Donovan was

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simply Peggy, who was the sister of Sammy and of Sergeant Patsy Donovan, and whom Mr. Wetherall had known, on and off, since she was a slum child of five. She was now seventeen and looked neat, competent and twenty.

"It's this milk," she said.

"What about it?"

"It's the Return."

"What's wrong with the Return?" Mr. Wetherall was cautious. He knew the power of Returns. "Have we shown more milk than we drank, or drunk more milk than we showed—incidentally, that's rather a good example of the difference between the aorist and perfect tense, isn't it?" Mr. Wetherall made a note for his grammar class.

"The figures come about right with a little cooking—"

"Adjustment."

"Adjustment. But now they want them showed—shown, I mean—in two separate lots. 'Milk served' and 'Milk drunk'."

"What the devil," said Mr. Wetherall, "do they think we do with it? Throw it at each other."

"They've done that before now," said Miss Donovan.

How would the Duke of Wellington have dealt with this?

"There's the boxing lists. I'm just going to put them up."

"I'd like to see them. Schools Area Final. That's tomorrow afternoon, isn't it? Where's it to be this time?"

"The Co-op Hall. Starting four o'clock."

"That's that rather dim place north of the Elephant, isn't it?" Mr. Wetherall made another note on his desk pad. "Is Sammy still in?"

"He surely is," said Miss Donovan. "Seven and under. He had to sweat off four ounces to make the weight."

"He ought to try standing on his head," said Mr. Wetherall.

It was a warm October day and even the brick and mortar of S.E.17 responded grudgingly to the ancient magic. The South Borough High School for Boys is in the middle of the quadrilateral formed by the Old Kent Road, the New Kent Road, the Camberwell Road and Peckham High Street. It is a square half-mile which is almost indescribable because it lacks the first element of description, which is character. It is made up of two or three hundred streets of uninspiring houses; seven churches and twenty-seven chapels; two very small open spaces, created by some bygone town-planning enthusiasm, and a dozen larger ones opened up by the German Air Force, but even these are subdued to the general pattern of uneasy neatness; the rubble is stamped flat, the yellow bricks are piled into neat heaps.

It is an area which lies in the middle of things greater than itself, but takes nothing from them. The Old Vic Theatre on the north, the Oval cricket ground on the west, the roaring goods yards of Bricklayers Arms and Crossways and the passenger stations at Waterloo and London Bridge. In this depressing arena the only arteries of life are the High Streets, where the blood flows red from

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chain store to chain store; where the social centre is the butcher's queue and the spiritual temple is the Gaudeon Super Cinema. Away from the High Street the splashes of colour are pubs, late and lonely flowerings in reds and greens and golds.

Mr. Wetherall made his way to the Old Kent Road and boarded a No. 53 bus, going south. Twenty minutes later he got off at the stop after Deptford Broadway. He was on the fringes of Blackheath. Not Blackheath proper, which lies at the top of the hill, around the open space, but near enough to it to put it on his note-paper. Postally, Brinkman Road was in Blackheath, if spiritually in Deptford.

The Wetheralls leased the top floor of No. 20. The house, which had suffered sub-division in the thirties, was owned by a doctor, and though he was twenty years retired from active practice, a faintly antiseptic smell still clung to the lower floors. Above the doctor lived two Japanese. Above the Japanese, the Wetheralls.

Immediately Mr. Wetherall got home he knew that something was amiss. Alice Wetherall was in the kitchen, her hands folded and her lips pursed.

"It's too bad," she said. "Major Francis' food parcel hasn't arrived."

"Oh, dear. Perhaps it's lost—"

"You know how regular he's been. When it was a week late I began to wonder. I wrote to the Railway on Friday. This came this morning."

It was hardly a letter. A printed memorandum. "Unable to trace the package in question—was there any proof of posting—admit no responsibility."

"It's been stolen," said Mrs. Wetherall.

"Stolen?"

"By those Railways. Didn't you see that bit in the paper last Sunday? No. It was the Sunday before. About all the parcels they were losing. Food parcels chiefly, and cigarettes. Why should they be allowed to? What do we—what do we pay our fares for?"

He thought for a moment she was going to cry.

"Never mind," he said. "I expect we can manage. We'll have a meal or two out for a change. Why don't we go to Luigi's tonight?"

"I'll think about it. Come and get your lunch now before it gets cold."

"That's to say, if the journey won't be too much for you—er, in your condition?"

"Now don't you fuss," said Mrs. Wetherall, more cheerfully. She had, of course, been fussing herself, but, like most women, found instant solace if she could accuse someone else of it. "It's the principle of the thing that upsets me. It's *our* parcel. Why should they be allowed to steal it? Can't we do anything about it, now they're nationalized?"

Instead of attempting to unravel this tangled piece of logic, Mr. Wetherall said he would ring the police immediately after lunch.

He knew that he was not at his best on the telephone. He was

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very slightly deaf, and was apt to get flustered. The Sergeant in charge of the Station was plainly neutral. He was not obstructive, nor was he helpful. He took particulars. He spelt Mr. Wetherall's name wrong, then got it right, then got the address wrong. He also wanted to know if there was any proof that the parcel had been dispatched, and when Mr. Wetherall had to admit that there was not, he lost most of his remaining interest. He said he would do what he could. He added that he was afraid there was a lot of pilfering on the Railways.

When Mr. Wetherall was on the point of leaving the house, he remembered their plans for the evening.

"I'd better meet you at Luigi's," he said. "I'll have to go straight there. I've got to take the drawing class this afternoon. That'll mean putting off my specials until after tea, so I shall be late, anyway. I'll see you there at seven."

"Do we want to go to Luigi's?"

"Why," said Mr. Wetherall, surprised. "We've always liked the food there so much. Do you want something a bit more classy?"

"Silly," said his wife. "It's only that I heard the other day—I think it was Mrs. Ormerod. She was saying that Mrs. Lewis told her—something about the food not being quite clean."

"I'd rather believe my own eyes," said Mr. Wetherall mildly, "than something Mrs. Ormerod said to Mrs. Lewis."

"Well, I always thought it was very nice, too."

"Luigi's let it be, then. If you observe so much as a single cockroach in the minestrone, we can always go somewhere else."

"Don't be horrid," said Mrs. Wetherall.

There are people who cannot draw. Mr. Wetherall was one of them.

Faced with a drawing class, his usual solution was to announce that the hour would be devoted to Free Inspiration, then to allot a suitable subject—(the choice was not easy). That afternoon, after some thought, he selected "A Street Accident" and retired to the master's desk to correct History papers.

For half an hour there was silence, broken only by some hard breathing, the scrape of feet, and the squeak of pencils. Red crayon seemed to be in demand. At the end of this time Mr. Wetherall climbed to his feet and toured the classroom to give an interim judgment on the results.

In the back row, somewhat to his surprise, he found a boy with an untouched sheet of drawing-paper in front of him. It was Crowdy, a quiet creature, whom he liked.

"What is it?" he said. "No inspiration?"

"I was just wondering, sir," said Crowdy, with a blush, "what a car would look like upside down."

"Why not draw it the right way up, and then turn the paper round."

Crowdy looked up with faint scorn and said, "I didn't mean resting on its back, sir. I meant the moment it hit the road, after

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being turned over. Why, the wheels might still be spinning—like this."

He picked up the pencil and quickly drew four or five lines. Thinking it over afterwards, Mr. Wetherall was prepared to swear that it was not more than five. And in front of his eyes an accident was born. He could see at once what must have happened. The car, cornering too fast on a greasy road, had turned, first onto its side and then right over. He could see by the crumpling of the coachwork and the distortion of the body how powerful the impact must have been. The drawing was foreshortened, and the nearest wheel, unnaturally large, was spinning; it was actually spinning in front of Mr. Wetherall's eyes.

"Yes," he said. "Yes. I see what you mean. I should go on with that. It looks very promising." He was aware that, in a small way, the thing might have happened which every schoolmaster dreams will happen to him—that he may be privileged to act midwife at the birth of genius. It is the most intoxicating thought a schoolmaster can have. Mr. Wetherall felt partially intoxicated as he went back to his desk.

Later, his practical sense asserted itself. Crowdy would be sixteen at the end of the summer. The next step was therefore important. After some thought and a hunt through a well-used address book, Mr. Wetherall took up his pen and wrote:

*I've got a boy here who looks as if he might be useful to you. I'm no art expert, as you know, but he draws a neat, clean line and has lots of self-confidence. He's leaving here in July. Would your people like to take him on? The only thing is, I'm afraid there's no question of apprenticeship. His family have got no money at all, so he'll have to be paid something, even when he's learning. I expect he can run errands and pour out the tea. How's Wright getting on? Best wishes to your wife and family.*

The letter was addressed to the Managing Director of Lithography and Artists Services Ltd. Mr. Wetherall sat back in his chair, looked at the clock which now said half past six, and sighed once more.

Having allowed plenty of time, he naturally picked up a bus at once, and arrived at Deptford Broadway with ten minutes to spare. All its lights were blazing, but Luigi's had a deserted look, and when he got inside he saw that only one of the tables was occupied, by a depressed-looking couple who were talking in whispers. Three months before, at that hour, the place would have been crowded.

Mr. Wetherall sat down at his usual table, opposite the service door, and picked up the handwritten menu. So far as he could judge the food was as varied and attractive as ever. At that moment Luigi came through the door. His name, actually, was Castelbonato, but the South Bank called him Luigi on the same simple principle that led them to call all German waiters Fritz and all French hairdressers Alphonse. His family had been in England for two genera-

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tions. His turn of phrase was still apt to be foreign, particularly when he was excited, but his accent was purest cockney.

"What's up, Luigi? Have you been frightening the customers away?" Then he saw the look on the little man's face and felt sorry for him.

"What'll it be, Mr. Wetherall?"

"I think I'll wait for my wife."

The couple at the other table signalled their bill. Luigi went over to them. When he came back he did a thing he had never done before and which, in a trained restaurateur, gave a little indication of how upset he was. He sat down in the chair opposite Mr. Wetherall.

"You can have what you like," he said. "Chicken—duck—I'm shutting up tomorrow."

"What's it all about?"

"No customers." Luigi waved his hand round the empty room. The bright lights. The clean cloths. The fresh flowers.

"What's it all about?" said Mr. Wetherall again.

Luigi took a deep breath.

"They bin saying my food's dirty. They bin coming along here making a fuss. Fortnight ago they come along and find a dead beetle in my ravioli. In *my* ravioli. Who would be likely to put such filth in, I ask you, them or me? They throw it in my face. A whole plateful—"

"Who—?" began Mr. Wetherall.

"Do not ask who. Ask why. I'll tell you. I used to take food from them. There's no secret. Bacon and sugar. All took it, you understand. I wasn't the only one. If we couldn't get it other place, we had to get it from them. Then I wanted to stop, you understand?"

"I don't—"

"They asked too much. Bacon and sugar and butter and tinned meat are good, but they are not good at five and six and seven shillings a pound. You can reckon it up for yourself, Mr. Wetherall, you know what I charge. In the West End, perhaps. That's West-End prices. Not here. So I said I must stop. Then they warned me—"

Luigi suddenly cut off the torrent of his speech, and Mr. Wetherall at last got the chance to say "Who are these people you're talking about, Luigi?"

Luigi was not listening. He had his head half turned, and in the silence that followed they both heard, beyond the service door, the outer door of the kitchen open and shut softly.

Luigi jumped to his feet and went out through the serving door.

At that moment Mrs. Wetherall arrived, five minutes late and full of insincere apologies.

They had, as Luigi had promised, an excellent dinner, but Mr. Wetherall did not find himself enjoying it.

Next morning Mr. Wetherall asked Miss Donovan for her elder brother's address.

"Patsy?" said Miss Donovan. "Why, he lives home now, Mr. Wetherall, with mother."

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The Donovan house was one in a row of the oldest houses in the district, a miracle of eroded brick, decaying wood and blackened stone, a sepulchre, whitened daily by the power of Mrs. Donovan's arm.

Mr. Wetherall went round to the back and found the Sergeant at breakfast in the kitchen. He was alone in the house, for his mother, though over sixty, still went out to do a morning's work at a block of offices near the Elephant, and Mr. Donovan had long ago drunk himself into an expensive grave.

"Why, come in."

Mr. Wetherall got his first shock when Sergeant Donovan spoke, and another when he got up and the light fell on his face.

"I'm sorry. I seem to be disturbing your breakfast."

"That's all right, Mr. Wetherall. Pleased to see you. Sit down."

The voice was hard. The red-headed boy and the big, well-made, pleasant young man had both gone. In their place was this heavy, and somehow rather dangerous-looking person.

"Some time since I've had the pleasure of seeing you, Mr. Wetherall."

"I expect we've both been busy."

Mr. Wetherall was playing for time. He was wondering whether the new Sergeant Donovan could help him. Might it be better to temporize—something about Sammy or Peggy—anything would do. He was aware that the Sergeant was looking at him steadily over his tea-cup.

In the end he said, "I came across something last night that I didn't much like. There wasn't anything I could do about it, but I felt it might help if I passed it on. It was at Luigi's—"

He told the whole story.

It was difficult to say if Sergeant Donovan was interested or not. He sat very still whilst Mr. Wetherall was talking and at the end he said, "Your idea about this, is it that someone's been starting a whisper about Luigi's food?"

"That's what he says."

"To run him out of business?"

"I suppose so."

"Anyone whose restaurant does bad, Mr. Wetherall, could think up a story like that. It'd be a sort of excuse, wouldn't it?"

"But he said they actually came and pretended to find insects and dirt in his food. They made a fuss in public. That sort of thing—"

"Why would they do that?"

"He said that he used to get food from these people—black-market stuff, I suppose. Then they put their prices up, and he couldn't pay. So they said, if he didn't pay they would drive him out of business."

"Well now," said Sergeant Donovan. "Who are 'they'? Who are these people he's talking about?"

"He didn't say."

"Any suggestions?"

"No. He just said 'they' and 'them'. You could see he was

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nervous about them. In fact, if he hadn't been so angry about it I don't think he would have said anything."

"I can believe that bit all right," said Donovan, with rather a tight smile. "Did he actually say that it was black-market food he'd been buying?"

"Not in so many words—I mean, I couldn't swear to it in a court of law."

"You won't be asked to do that," said the Sergeant, reading Mr. Wetherall's thoughts accurately. "It's not Mister Luigi What's-is-name you've got to worry about. He's just the meat in the trap. He's the worm on the hook. Once people like him start fooling round with funny stuff they always end up in trouble, one side or the other. It's the people who supply the Luigis that I'd like to have a quiet word with. Or the people who supply *them*. Just a quiet word."

As he spoke he moved across to the window, so that the light fell on a white line of scar which ran down, stretched and taut, from cheek-bone to chin, so that for a moment, the jaw seemed to hang from it, like a puppet's jaw on a thread. When the Sergeant turned back into the room he spoke more mildly.

"So far as doing anything about this goes," he said, "I'm L Division. Luigi's place is in Deptford Broadway, that's R."

"Is it?" said Mr. Wetherall. The geography he had been taught had not included the frontiers of the London Police authorities.

"However, I'll see if anything can be done. I might put in a word in the right quarter, but my best advice to you, Mr. Wetherall, is to leave it alone. They're not a nice crowd, the people behind this. Not a nice crowd at all."

"Thank you," said Mr. Wetherall. "I'm sure if anything can be done you'll do it."

As soon as he got back to the school he sent for Peggy.

"What's it all about?" he said.

"All what, Mr. Wetherall?"

"Your brother—living at home. What's happened?"

"I've been waiting a chance to tell you about that," said Peggy. "Patsy doesn't like to talk about Doris now. You know they had one of the houses in Lower Marsh. Some men broke in one night. I expect they knew Patsy was away on duty. Doris was alone in the house. They tied her up and gagged her with a towel. They bust the place up. They didn't take much. Just some papers and a little money."

Peggy stopped, and Mr. Wetherall tried to say something, but failed. The truth was that the idea of violence frightened him. At second hand it made him feel rather sick.

"They tied the towel over her mouth too tight. She was suffocated. She was dead when Patsy got home to her.

"Patsy says he knows who it was. But he can't prove it. You know his job is something to do with stealing from the Railways, and the long distance lorries—"

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"If he knows," said Mr. Wetherall, very much distressed, "if he knows, surely—"

"Knowing isn't proving. There was one particular lot he was mixed up with. He didn't say much about it. He'd been pretending to take bribes, and they thought he was bought and sold so they got talking a bit freely in front of him. What they did was meant as a sort of warning to him not to pass it on—they never meant to kill Doris."

"It was murder, whether they meant to kill her or not."

"I suppose it was," said Peggy. She seemed unexcited about this aspect of it. For a moment Mr. Wetherall wondered if she might have been making the story up. He dismissed that thought. Nobody could have made up a thing like that.

"Has he told anyone about his suspicions? If the police only knew, surely they could do something. It would give them a line to go on."

"They had an Inspector from Scotland Yard on it. He didn't get very far."

"You're not answering my question," said Mr. Wetherall testily. "Did Patsy tell them what he suspected—what you've just told me?"

"He couldn't, Mr. Wetherall. Really, it was just suspicions."

"So he didn't say."

"No."

"Somebody ought to."

Peggy looked up in alarm.

"I don't think Patsy would like that."

Mr. Wetherall could hardly fail to recognize it. He had heard it twice that morning. It was the red signal. It was the notice which said *KEEP OUT! Trespassers will get hurt.* The dullest man, and Mr. Wetherall was far from dull, cannot live his life in South London without becoming aware of certain facts. He was not a romantic. He was well past the age when one considered crime to be an adventure, or a puzzle, or a joke. He recognized it for what it was, a pathological growth, bred of poverty, rooting and flourishing in the weak and diseased cells of the body.

Crime would not interfere with him, provided that he did not interfere with it. That was the limit of the sufferance.

In the end he said rather weakly, "All right, Peggy. I expect you're right. Are you coming to the boxing?"

"You try and keep me away," said Peggy.

When he arrived home he was so unusually silent that his wife, after a number of unsuccessful efforts to obtain his attention, asked him what was the matter, and after some deliberation, he told her a certain amount.

"It's nothing to do with you," said Mrs. Wetherall.

"So two other people have informed me already this morning."

"Well, is it?"

"Not really, I suppose," said Mr. Wetherall. "Except, if you see a thing going wrong, you ought to try and put it right."

"If he really knew who these people were," said Mrs. Wetherall,

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" and if he had any real proof against them, he'd have them arrested. He's a policeman."

" Yes. He's also an Irishman."

" I don't—"

" When he was a boy, he always liked to handle things himself. Sammy's the same. And Peggy, for that matter. It's a Donovan habit."

" What do you want to do ? "

" I don't know. I wasn't very happy about one thing. Peggy told me that her brother had got into the confidence of one of the gangs by pretending to take bribes. Well, that's all right in theory, but in practice it must be a very fine line between pretending to take them, and actually taking them—if you see what I mean."

" Yes," said Mrs. Wetherall doubtfully.

" He pockets the money either way, you see. He may be saying, I'm only doing this to fool them, and sooner or later I'll pay it over to the Police Orphanage, but—"

" I see what you mean," said Mrs. Wetherall. " You think that's why he daren't tell anyone who they are—"

" It could be one of the reasons, couldn't it ? "

Mr. Wetherall made his way to the Co-op Hall through the October fog which had come up at dusk. In fog and in darkness the South Bank seemed more tolerable. Its outlines were softened. The lights from the shops and the naphtha flares from the booths made brave splashes of light. The lamps behind the red curtains gave an impression of snugness to the inconvenient little houses.

The hall was packed. The South Borough High School had two other boys besides Donovan in the Area Finals and Mr. Wetherall had meant to go round to the changing-room and give them a last-minute word of encouragement. Then, because he had an understanding mind, he sat down in his seat. They would all, he realised, be going through agonies of nervousness ; one's first public boxing match was an ordeal beside which any future ordeal, from the dentist's to the electric chair, must pale into insignificance. Anyway, their trainer, a competent and taciturn man, would be with them.

The master of ceremonies entered the ring. " Three rounds of two minutes—no applause during the rounds, please—highest traditions of sportsmanship—no clinching, holding or gouging—best man win."

At that moment, Mr. Wetherall became aware of his neighbour. He smelled him first.

Parma Violet and After-Shave Lotion. Then his eyes took him in. Black hair, a white face, and a striking suit of clothes—bold pattern, thick cloth, rolled lapels, stuffed shoulders. A metal-green tie. Pointed brown shoes. All the success signals. On looking again it occurred to Mr. Wetherall that he knew him. Pollock, Postgate, Partridge. It began with a P. He conducted a mental roll-call. Parry, Parsons, Price. That was more like it. Not Price, though. Prince !

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He was so pleased at getting it that he spoke the name aloud. The man turned slowly, and seeing his full face, on which the flesh was beginning to hang, he realised that the man was older than he had first imagined—and also that he was blind in one eye.

All the same, he was sure he was right. "I'm so sorry," said Mr. Wetherall. "I thought—"

What he thought was lost in a fresh outburst of cheering.

"Can't hear."

"I said," he shouted, "that I thought—"

"Why, it's Mr. Wetherall."

Prince shot out a fat white hand, at the end of a thick wrist. Gold cuff-links winked against silk shirt cuff. "How's tricks? Been finding any dead kittens lately?"

This was a reference to a long-forgotten, and not very happy, episode in Mr. Wetherall's early teaching career at Battersea, and he laughed half-heartedly.

"It's frogs nowadays, not kittens," he said. "And what have you been doing since I saw you last?"

"In and out of the ring. You seen my eye? Lost that fighting. Mug's game. Near as a nicker lost the other one too. Then I stopped. S'all right for boys and amachoors. Does 'em good. Not professional, though. They know too much, those professional boys."

"Seven stone and under," announced the Master of Ceremonies. "In the red sash, Peter Dawkin, Walworth Secondary School. In the blue sash, Sam Donovan, South Borough Secondary School—" From the back of the hall Mr. Wetherall heard the Donovan family giving tongue.

Sam sat in the corner, pretending to listen to what his second was saying, his red hair in striking contrast to his white singlet. Then the bell sounded and the fight was on.

It was the sort of fight which often results where one of the parties has a balance on science and the other a balance on courage. At the end of the first round the front of Sammy's vest was almost as red as his hair. At the end of the second, he had a fast closing right eye, and even the Donovan family were beginning to sound anxious. In the middle of the third round Sam seemed to collect himself, and hit his opponent once, very, very hard, in the face. After that the opposition crumbled, and he came out a handsome winner.

Mr. Wetherall attended only partly to the fight. He had seen Sammy perform too often to have any serious doubts as to the result. The more active part of his mind was concerned with the man sitting next to him. Everything about him said Money. But not, he felt, very good money. Surely a half-blind boxer, one who had never reached the first flight and had now slipped out of the game altogether, could not be earning a great deal. He might have others jobs, of course.

At that moment, the mass hysteria making all normal speech impossible, Prince leaned across and shouted, "Good boy, that," and added, "Sammy's Patsy Donovan's brother, ent he?"

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"Yes. Do you know Sergeant Donovan?"

"I've heard of him," said Prince with a grin. "Patsy's a bright boy, too." He consulted an expensive watch. "I gotter scarper now. Quite like old times seeing you again. Ever you're up West you must come and have a drink at my club."

"Er—certainly," said Mr. Wetherall, slightly surprised. "I'm afraid I don't know—"

"The Atheeneum," said Prince. "Just ask for the Bishop of London. Ta ta."

"Eight stone and under," said the announcer.

Mr. Wetherall sat looking thoughtfully after the back of the retreating Prince.

He decided he would not go directly home after the match. By making a slight detour he could visit the school, and there were some exam papers he wanted to pick up. He collected the papers and found a letter, which had evidently arrived by the evening post. It was from the Managing Director of Lithography & Artists Services Ltd., who said that he would be pleased to take on Crowdy as a paid junior assistant at a starting salary of £3 a week, and how was Mrs. Wetherall keeping?

It capped the end of a rather successful day. All of his boys had won their bouts and now it looked as if he had done what he could to place Crowdy's foot on the bottom rung of the ladder—that narrow, unstable, overcrowded ladder which leads up to eminence in the arts.

Warmed by this glow of altruism he decided that he would break the good news to the Crowdy family at once. By making a further small detour he could go past their house, and then catch his bus one stop further along.

Outside, the fog had thickened. He made his way into the Old Kent Road, crossed it, and after a moment's hesitation, chose one of the side streets running along the northern side of the Bricklayers Arms Railway Goods Yard. As he went by, he stopped for a moment to look through an open doorway at the complicated hell within. A huge, concrete-floored building with concrete loading-ramps round three of the sides. Single unshaded electric lights fighting a losing battle with the fog. Vans loading and unloading. Hurrying figures, the familiars of the place, in leather-peaked caps, and overalls, which might originally have been of any colour, now blackened to a drab uniformity by grease and dirt. Above the throng, in detached hutches round the perimeter, the dispatchers and parcels clerks, slapping on labels and making entries in books. And, all around, an ocean of parcels, packages, bales, boxes, coops, crates, and cartons: things tied lengthways in bundles, things wrapped in sacks, things wrapped in straw. Where, amongst all this, might one tiny food parcel be lying?

He became aware that a Railway Policeman was standing just inside the entrance, watching him.

"They're very busy tonight," he said.

"You ought to see them at Christmas," said the policeman.

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"Well, good night."

The policeman said nothing to this.

The Crowdy house was discovered without much difficulty. It was a thin and dirty house, in a terrace of thin and dirty houses. The front door, at the top of a flight of steps which spanned the area across a flying buttress of concrete, was ajar. Mr. Wetherall pulled the bell but this proved to be a waste of time, since it was quite obviously not attached to anything. He knocked, without result, pushed the door open and went in.

Usually he was most scrupulous about such things but he felt that as a bearer of good tidings, it would probably be forgiven him: also he was late for his supper.

Crowdy was alone in the room. He was sitting at a table with a piece of paper pinned out in front of him and he had been doing something with pens, steel rulers and Indian ink. From where he stood he could see the end of one word—it looked like—AGE followed by PA—which was the beginning of another word. Crowdy's face was as white as a sheet. He stood, saying nothing.

"I'm sorry to butt in," said Mr. Wetherall. "I only came to tell you—"

He got no further. The door behind him burst open. Before he could turn he was seized by the collar and run out into the passage. When he got free and managed to turn round, he saw that it was Mr. Crowdy. He had only met him once before. His first idea was that he was drunk.

The heavy face was dark red, the eyes staring.

"Get out of here and stay out. Keep going."

"Really, I—"

"Bloody snoopers."

"I only came in to tell you—"

"Who asked you to come in?"

"Well, no one—"

"Then go out and keep out. And keep your bloody great nose out of my house. Sticking it in where it isn't asked for. Snoopers, schoolmasters—"

Conscious that the steep front steps with a drop into the area on either side might not be the best place for a harassed retreat, Mr. Wetherall broke clear and ran from the house. When he reached the pavement he turned. Mr. Crowdy had not followed him. He was standing in the doorway—his face still red and his mouth working.

"I must protest—" began Mr. Wetherall.

"Keep it for the boys," said Mr. Crowdy. The door slammed.

Mr. Wetherall walked very fast down the street. His breath was coming in gasps, as if he had been running. His heart was thudding and his mouth felt dry. Real, deliberate, unprovoked rudeness can be quite as shocking as physical violence. He felt as if his face had been smacked. He walked for ten minutes before he could trust himself to get on a bus.

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JOCK'S PULL-IN

At breakfast, on the morning following his visit to the Crowdy house, Mr. Wetherall reflected on the happenings of the night before. Seen through the filter of a night's rest, and in the calmer light of morning, they had lost a little of their sting.

He thought, on the whole, that Mr. Crowdy had either been drunk, or had been suffering under the stress of a strong emotion. Working-class parents did odd things.

No doubt a word with Crowdy would straighten things out.

When he reached the school he was plunged at once into a sea of administrative worries. It was the eleven o'clock break before he got round to thinking about Crowdy, and sent Peggy to fetch him. She returned five minutes later to report that there was no sign of him.

"What's happened to him?"

"He didn't turn up this morning. I expect this may be something to do with it. Roberts brought it. He lives in the next street to Crowdy."

Mr. Wetherall opened the envelope. It was one which had apparently been delivered to Mr. Crowdy with some Pools literature, and Mr. Crowdy had simply crossed out his own name and address and had written on it, in a curiously clerkly hand "The Headmaster." The note inside was brief. It said, "My son has chicken-pox and will not be at school for approx. 3 weeks. Yrs sincerely."

"Hmp!" said Mr. Wetherall. "Is there any chicken-pox in the Bricklayers district, Peggy?"

"Search me," said Peggy. "There's whooping-cough in the Albany Road and mumps at Waterloo."

Mr. Wetherall said "Hmp" again. He took down a fat and shabby folder, alphabetically indexed, ran his finger through it, and picked out a card.

Crowdy's father, he saw, was described as a dispatch clerk, employed by British Railways, and working at Crossways Goods Station.

He slipped the card back into the folder and placed with it the note he had just received. He was about to throw the envelope away when he saw something written on the back, also in Mr. Crowdy's handwriting. "Jock's Pull-In for Carmen." After a moment's thought he put the envelope with the letter.

After that he taught the Senior Class an hour of unusually absent-minded history and, finding that he had an early class that afternoon which prevented him going home, slipped out to get himself some lunch.

Outside the side gate he bumped into Luigi. The little man was in wait for him.

"Oh, Mr. Wetherall."

Mr. Wetherall withdrew himself from a reverie of Mr. Crowdy.

"Mr. Wetherall, I got to speak to you."

"What is it?" he said. "Come into the small classroom with me."

"Mr. Wetherall, you must stop it. I should not have spoken to you." He hammered the top of the desk in his earnestness. "You must stop it at once."

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"Stop what?"

"It was stupid of me. I was mad. I said certain things—" he swallowed hard—"they were not true. Now you must stop."

"Look here," said Mr. Wetherall, "I want my lunch. If you can't talk sense, I shall have to ask you to go. What am I supposed to stop?"

"You went to see Sergeant Donovan?"

"Well—yes, I did."

"You went also to see Mr. Crowdy. I know. You must not do it. Mr. Wetherall. Please."

Mr. Wetherall was trying to adjust himself to the slight nervous reflex which everyone must experience when they find that, unknown to themselves, their movements have been of interest to others.

"I suppose it's no good telling you," he said at last, "that there was absolutely no connection whatever between going to see Sergeant Donovan, and Crowdy."

"Mr. Wetherall, please don't do it. I—I shall get into trouble. I been in trouble already."

"Yes," said Mr. Wetherall. He could guess about that trouble. It was not necessarily the sort of trouble which would leave a black eye or a split lip: but it was real trouble, all the same.

"All right," he said. "Whatever it is you think I've been doing, I promise I won't do it again."

Luigi's relief at this rather qualified concession was astonishing. "That's right," he said. "Now we all forget about it, eh?" He jumped up, shook Mr. Wetherall's hand, and shot out of the room.

Mr. Wetherall followed, but more slowly. He hardly noticed what he was given to eat for lunch.

He was fully aware of the curious strands of his own character. But the fact that he recognized them, as any toper or drug addict may recognize and deplore his own weaknesses, did not make him competent to counteract them.

He knew, for instance, that he was afflicted with the most malignant type of obstinacy. Did fate so much as nudge him in one direction, he would automatically strive to move in an opposite one. He could no more help doing this than a frog's leg could help jumping when an electric current was passed through it. It was immaterial that this opposite direction might be one in which he had no real desire to go—one in which every rational faculty told him he ought not to go.

After paying the bill he walked back in the direction of the Crowdy house. It would have been no use asking him why he did this, because he had no idea himself.

The street was empty and quiet, and the house looked inoffensive. Mr. Wetherall knocked, waited, knocked again and then waited for a long time. I'll count twenty, he told his conscience, and then if no one comes I'll give it up. He had reached fifteen when he heard a faint shuffling, as of slippered feet. Then the door opened a few inches and a very old woman looked out, a faded, dusty amalgam of whites and greys and blacks.

"Is Mr. Crowdy at home?"

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"No, he ent," said the old lady.

"Is his son in the house?"

"No, he ent in neither."

"Is there anyone at home?"

"Not except for me there ent a creature in the house."

The lie was at once given to this statement by the appearance of a sleek black cat, which shot through the narrow opening and disappeared down the area.

"There now," said the old lady, "Tibby's out. He won't come back now till tomorrow morning."

"Do you know where they are?"

"They all gone to work."

"What?" said Mr. Wetherall. "The boy as well? But he's—"

"He's gone fifteen," said the old lady, who seemed to have her wits about her. "Why shouldn't he work? I started earning a wage when I was eight," she added.

"I—well—it can't be helped." Mr. Wetherall felt frustrated. "I'll come back this evening."

"You're the schoolmaster, ent you?"

"Yes."

"I'll tell him you called." She parted her gums in a smile which might have been malicious, but was probably merely friendly.

Mr. Wetherall walked back to the school, deep in thought. When he got there he sent for Peggy.

"Do we know anyone on the railway?" he asked.

"Plenty, I should think," said Peggy. "It's a favourite job round here."

"Crossways?"

"I'll have a look. Any particular sort of person you had in mind?"

"Well—I don't want a boy who just joined last week as a porter. Someone with a bit of seniority—"

Peggy was back within five minutes. "William Fisher's the man you want."

"Bill Fisher. Yes." Mr. Wetherall had to go back a number of years to place him. A fat, cheerful boy, always late for school, but popular with everyone.

"He's administrative grade," said Peggy. "I think that means some sort of staff manager. And he was at Crossways when we last had a note of him. That's the number. Extension 341."

Mr. Wetherall had found his man. After he had introduced himself on the telephone, he mentioned what was in his mind.

He decided to stick, as closely as possible, to the truth.

"You see," he said, "this boy—he's just leaving—I'm not happy about him. Crowdy's the name. He's got some sort of job on the railway—at Crossways, I think—with his father. I wanted to talk to someone who could give me the form—"

"Delighted," said Fisher. "Was there anything particular you had in mind?" Mr. Wetherall said it was difficult to talk about it over the telephone.

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Fisher thought this over. What, he suggested, did Mr. Wetherall say to a talk over a bite somewhere that evening?

Mr. Wetherall said that would suit him very well.

"I'm off at six," said Fisher. "I usually have a snack at a place by the Elephant—I don't suppose it's much in your line—Jock's Cafe. A lot of railwaymen use it."

Something stirred in Mr. Wetherall's memory.

"Jock's Pull-In for Carmen," he said.

"That's right. You know the place? Say half past six?"

"Splendid," said Mr. Wetherall. "Splendid." He rang off. He had the distinct feeling that he might have started something. The odd thing was that, at the time, he felt quite pleased about it.

Jock's Pull-In was more pretentious than its name suggested. It was a long, bright room, full of marble-topped, iron-legged tables. It was crowded with railwaymen, mostly outdoor men and drivers. The place had its own car park, formed of a blitzed site, at the back of the restaurant, and this was packed with vans and trailers.

Fighting down the feeling that he was making his way into a club to which he did not belong, Mr. Wetherall steered a course down the centre gangway and got in behind one of the few empty tables.

He studied the menu, which offered: "Egg and chips, Sausage and chips, Bacon and chips, Steak and chips. Or Mixed, with or without tomato."

That seemed fair enough.

"Eggs, bacon, sausages and chips," said Mr. Wetherall to the girl. "No tomato."

"And coffee."

"Yes—and coffee."

"And bread and butter."

"All right. And bread and butter."

The girl disappeared and Mr. Wetherall took a quick look round the crowded room. The proprietor was a fat man, with jowls like a bulldog, small bloodshot eyes, and a thin fringe of grey hair which lay like a moat round an island of mottled flesh. The customers called him Pop.

He was serving one section of tables himself, as well as handling the cash register.

When the food arrived it was excellent. Mr. Wetherall added a name to the mental list that all Londoners carry of good and unexpected eating places. The rashers were real thick pre-war ones with an even division of fat and lean. The butter was real butter.

At that moment Bill Fisher arrived. It took him a little time to reach the table, because he seemed to know almost everyone in the room. "Well, and how are you, Mr. Wetherall? Nice to see you. You've got yours, have you? That's right. You start away. Pop always does you well here. You oughter try his steaks—"

"Steaks?" said Mr. Wetherall faintly.

"Steaks it is. And not gee-gee neither. Ah—there's the girl. And how are things tonight, Miss Russell?"

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"The name, Mr. Fisher, is Bessie."

"Well, there now. You know, Bessie, with a figure like yours you oughter be on the stage."

"It's only the linoleum that keeps me from the boards, Mr. Fisher."

"Smart, too," said Mr. Fisher. "Makes up her own gags. I'll have the same as this gentleman, Bessie."

"It's a popular place," ventured Mr. Wetherall.

"The Railwayman's Arms, you might call it. Or the Van-drivers' Home from Home. It's handy, see. And Pop used to be on the railway. In the old London Brighton and South Coast. He used to walk in front of the engine with a red flag, didn't you, Pop?"

"That's right, Mr. Fisher. I used to clear the cows off the line. Always glad to see a friend of yours—"

The last part of the sentence seemed to have a question mark at the end of it.

"More than a friend," said Fisher. "This is my old schoolmaster. Many's the time he's tanned the hide off me, Pop."

"I expect you earned it."

"Of course I earned it. I was the worst boy in the school."

"Well, any time you pass, Mr. Wetherall, just drop in. I can give you as good to eat here as anywhere up West."

"Thank you very much," said Mr. Wetherall. "I'm sure you can." If he spoke a little absently—and if he also failed to hear some of the early part of Fisher's conversation—it may have been because he was trying to work out how Pop had suddenly become aware of his name.

". . . just a paster," said Fisher.

"I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch that."

"He was a label-sticker. Worked in the Forwarding Office."

"Who did?"

"Old Crowdy," said Fisher patiently. "The chap you were asking about."

"And that was at Crossways?"

"That's right. All the stuff that comes in goes through the Forwarding Office. The clerks mark it up—Special Delivery, C.O.D., Carriage Forward—whatever it might be. Pasters we call 'em."

"I see," said Mr. Wetherall. He explained, with some suppressions, the details of Crowdy's case.

"Seems a bit of a waste to me," said Fisher. "If the boy's got talent, like you said."

"He's over fifteen," said Mr. Wetherall. "I can't stop him if he wants to go—or rather, if his father wants to take him."

"Dispatch clerk isn't much of a job. Mind you, it's cushy. He won't come to any harm. But he won't get fat on it, neither. If he's got a good head-piece he wants to get on to the Administrative side. Like," Fisher added without any shrinking modesty, "me."

"Yes," said Mr. Wetherall. "I was afraid it might be rather a dead end."

"Can't you talk to his old man—"

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"I tried that," said Mr. Wetherall. He told Fisher something about that.

"Well, that's a rum go, if you like," said Fisher. "Old Harry Crowdy fly off the handle. I'd never have thought it of him. With another chap I'd suggest he might have been tight, but drink don't take Harry Crowdy that way—it mellows him. That's the way it is with some people—"

"Look here," said Mr. Wetherall—he didn't mean to say it abruptly; it was just that the thought had come into his mind rather suddenly—"is there really such a lot of stealing on the Railways?"

Fisher didn't answer that immediately. When he did there was a noticeable shade of reserve in his voice.

"There's quite a bit," he said.

Mr. Wetherall realized that some explanation was due, "It's not just curiosity," he said. "I lost a food parcel myself last week."

"You're sure it was sent?"

"That's what everybody says," said Mr. Wetherall. "That's what the police wanted to know. Yes. I am sure. But I couldn't prove it."

"You've been to the police, then."

"I reported it. They weren't very enthusiastic."

"They wouldn't be," said Fisher. He laughed, but he didn't sound amused. "It's tricky. If they put a foot wrong on a thing like that they get up against the Union."

"Oh," said Mr. Wetherall. It was a new factor.

"There's a lot of pilfering everywhere. Docks, road transport. Warehouses. I don't suppose the railwaymen are worse than anyone else. It's just that they get special opportunities. A lot of the stuff they handle's scarce stuff. There's a market for it, see. And it isn't like putting it in a warehouse. If it goes from a warehouse you know who's responsible. On the railway it goes through a lot of hands."

"Yes," said Mr. Wetherall. "There are bound to be losses. I can see that. But is it just a lot of casual pilfering, or is it organized?"

"Sauce," said a voice.

A tall man had drifted up, as silently as a snow-cloud. Mr. Wetherall got a fleeting impression of a scrubbed red face, close-cropped hair, light blue eyes, and a pair of large red hands. One of these hands came over Mr. Wetherall's shoulder and picked up the sauce bottle from the middle of the table.

For just a moment longer than was absolutely necessary the newcomer remained there, leaning on the table, he looked at Fisher, who opened his mouth to say something, then shut it again.

Then the man was gone, as suddenly as he had come, threading his way back to a table at the door.

"Why should he bother to come all the way over here?" said Mr. Wetherall. "There's plenty of sauce on the other tables."

"Oh, he's a character," said Fisher shortly. "Guardsman, they call him. Believe he was in the Guards once." As he spoke, and with great rapidity, he was pushing the last few chips into his mouth. Now he swallowed the remains of his coffee, stood up, said

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"I'll settle with Pop next time. I've got to run now—" and he was gone.

Mr. Wetherall sat still. He suddenly felt very much alone.

Panic is a curious thing. Like the tide advancing over a salt marsh, it comes by strange channels. One moment it is not there. The next and it is everywhere.

Suddenly everyone in the room seemed to be talking louder than was necessary. One group at the door, where the Guardsman sat, with his arm half round the man next to him, was particularly noisy.

Mr. Wetherall looked round. It seemed to him that people were avoiding his eye.

He forced himself to sit back in his chair and to breathe slowly. It was like being at the edge of a precipice. If you sat quite still, after a time, confidence returned.

The girl was serving the table next to him. He called her, and found he had to call twice, because his mouth was dry. She came quite readily.

"How much?"

"Egg, bacon, sausages, coffee, bread and butter. That's four shillings."

Mr. Wetherall had two half-crowns ready in his pocket and he slipped them to the girl. "Keep the change," he said, "and tell me is there anywhere here I can telephone?"

"Through that door." She pointed to a door in the corner, beyond the service door.

When the girl had gone Mr. Wetherall picked up his half empty cup and sipped at the cold coffee. "I shall count ten," he said to himself.

Then he put the cup down, got quickly to his feet, and walked to the door. Beyond it was a passage, dimly lighted. He went along it. At the end the passage turned. To the right were some stairs, going down. On the left was a door, clearly an outside door. Mr. Wetherall put his hand to the handle and uttered a prayer, which was answered. The door was not locked. It led out into the car park.

As he went through it and closed it behind him, he thought he heard footsteps coming along the passage he had just left.

There was no light at all in the car park. He could make out the shapes of lorries all about him, and he felt his way past the tailboards of two of them, and then along between the side of a third one and the wall. He felt safe in the dark. He stood whilst his breathing steadied, and he wondered if he had been behaving like a fool.

There was a long, spreading fan of light. Someone had opened the door. Then footsteps on the gravel. It was two men. They came straight out, walked to the front of the lorries and stopped a few paces away from where Mr. Wetherall was standing, squeezed between the outside lorry and the wall.

"As long as they aren't going to move this one—" he thought.

The nearer man was Pop. He recognized his voice, without

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being able to hear what he said. Then, as the other man moved, his nose picked up a well known scent. It was Parma Violet. That could mean Prince. Mr. Wetherall hardly felt surprised. If Pop was engaged in buying black-market food there was nothing extraordinary in Prince being one of the people selling it to him.

They were using a torch inside the cab of the next lorry but one. The murmur of voices went on. Then the cab door slammed. Pop said, "Where are you for? The Aldershot ladies?" And Prince's voice, quite amiable, saying "Mind your own bloody business, Pop." Headlights flicked on, the engine started, the lorry moved forward, swung right, right again and was gone. Pop walked slowly back and slammed the door behind him.

Mr. Wetherall wasted no more time. A minute later he was in the High Street, walking fast.

When he reached his house he found his wife waiting for him on the stairs. As soon as she saw him she burst into tears.

"Now then, Alice," said Mr. Wetherall sternly. "What's all this about?"

"I was so worried."

"I'm often late on Wednesday. And you knew I was getting my meal out—"

"It was the man—"

"What man?"

"A man telephoned, about an hour ago. He said he hoped you were all right."

"What sort of man—"

"He hadn't got a very nice voice," said Mrs. Wetherall. "I asked him who he was and why should he think you weren't all right. He just laughed."

"Laughed, did he?" said Mr. Wetherall thoughtfully.

"Yes. Then he rang off."

### THE MORNING AFTER

Mr. Wetherall went to school on Thursday morning with one fixed intention. That was to forget about the events of the last three days.

"A lady to see you," said Peggy.

"Oh."

"No need to straighten your tie. This girl friend won't see seventy again. I put her in the small classroom. She wouldn't come upstairs. She says its important."

"All right," said Mr. Wetherall.

In the classroom—it was the same one in which he had talked to Luigi—he found old Mrs. Crowdy.

"He's dead," she said.

Mr. Wetherall looked at her stupidly.

"Fell over a bridge at the main-line intersection and broke himself up."

Mr. Wetherall battled with the fear that had got hold of him.

"Peter—?"

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"No. No. Not the boy. His father."

"When did it happen?"

"This morning. He goes off to work at six with the boy. The boy's back home now. I come straight along—"

She had come straight along, on her feet. An adventurous journey for an old lady. When in trouble, go to the schoolmaster or the parson.

"Rent's paid to the end of the week," she said, "then we'll have to move."

Mr. Wetherall looked at her helplessly.

"What are you going to do?"

"I shall be all right." She spoke with the authority of one who has survived for three-quarters of a century at the level of bare subsistence. "It's the boy—"

"I can give him a bed—for a night or two, anyway. After that I can probably fix something." It was the sort of arrangement he had had to make more than once before, in the recurrent crises which occurred in the lives of his pupils. "What about family?"

"I'm all the family he's got," said the old lady. "I never heard he had no other. His mother was from Wales. Might be some family there. They'll take some getting hold of."

"That's all right. I have to ask. I've seen trouble caused that way before." He got a bit of paper and wrote on it, "I, Mrs. Amelia Crowdy, being the paternal grandmother and, to the best of my knowledge, the only surviving relative of Peter Crowdy, agree to placing him in the custody of the headmaster of South Borough High School until such time as permanent arrangements can be made for him."

He read this out to Mrs. Crowdy who repeated "paternal grandmother" proudly to herself, nodded her head and signed her name with surprising clarity.

"You know my address," said Mr. Wetherall. "There, I'll write it down for you. Tell Peter to get his things together and go straight along. He can take a bus. I'll telephone my wife—"

When she had gone he went back to his study. He placed the paper in the Crowdy folder, noticing as he did so the last letter which Mr. Crowdy had sent him and the envelope with the scribbled note on the back "Jock's Pull-In for Carmen." In the press of events it had slipped his memory. Now he pulled the envelope out and sat looking at it.

"Sergeant Donovan," announced Peggy formally. She spoilt the effect by adding, "Wipe your feet, Patsy, there's a boy. I just swept the carpet this morning—"

"Come in, Sergeant. Put the engaged notice up, would you, Peggy."

"I shan't keep you long, I hope."

"About Crowdy?"

Sergeant Donovan turned sharply. Some feeling showed in his eyes.

"Who told you that, Mr. Wetherall?"

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"I had old Mrs. Crowdy round here just now. Poor old soul. She says she can look after herself. I've taken the boy off her hands till we can fix something."

"I see." Sergeant Donovan sounded disconcerted. He had come to say something, to take a certain line with Mr. Wetherall, and he was out of his stride.

"Was it an accident?"

"I suppose you could walk over a three-foot parapet if you had enough on your mind."

"What sort of thing do you mean?"

"That's something I hoped *you* might be able to tell *me*," said Sergeant Donovan, "seeing you've been to his house twice lately."

"No doubt," said Mr. Wetherall stiffly.

"Well now, what did you and Mr. Crowdy find to talk about?"

"Let me ask you a question for a change. Why are you interested in Crowdy?"

"We're always interested in people who get themselves killed."

"Yes," said Mr. Wetherall. "But he hadn't been killed last night. Were you watching him? How did you know I'd been to see him?"

"Peggy told me."

Mr. Wetherall considered. He didn't believe it. But it was just conceivable that it was true.

"All right," he said. "For what it's worth, I'll tell you about it. I went to see Crowdy on the night of the boxing—that was Tuesday night. I went to tell him that I'd fixed up a job for Peter—that's the boy. He threw me out. For absolutely no reason at all, that I could see. He wouldn't have schoolmasters snooping and prying round his house. That sort of thing. I thought at the time he was drunk. I don't think so now. I believe he was frightened."

"Ah," said Sergeant Donovan. "Yes."

"Now look here," said Mr. Wetherall. He tried to remind himself that the formidable person in front of him had once, not so very long ago, been a boy to whom he had taught the dates of the Kings and Queens of England. "I insist on knowing what this is all about."

Sergeant Donovan got up.

"You asked me if I thought it was an accident," he said.

"Yes."

"If it *was* an accident, all I can say is it's not the sort I want happening to me."

"What?"

"I don't think Harry Crowdy fell off that bridge, Mr. Wetherall. Experienced rail men don't fall off bridges—even if it's a bit dark or slippery, and a mist about. Nor I don't think that the train which went over him afterwards did all the damage. I think he was thrown over. And if you want the truth, Mr. Wetherall, I think he was broken up before he was thrown."

"Broken up," repeated Mr. Wetherall stupidly.

"A pick helve or a spade," said Sergeant Donovan. "Not nice," he added, as he walked over to the window.

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Mr. Wetherall said nothing. He was thinking of Mr. Crowdy, as he had seen him red-faced, stupid—frightened.

"Why would anyone do that?" he said at last.

"They're a nasty crowd," said Sergeant Donovan. "And when money's the object, they aren't going to pull their punches. But all the same, I can't see them doing a thing like that to a harmless old packet like Crowdy unless—well, unless they knew he was stooling."

"Stooling?"

"Informing. There's almost nothing they wouldn't do to an informer."

When Mr. Wetherall got home he found his wife and Peter Crowdy sitting in front of the fire.

He thought at first that the scarlet patch in each of the boy's cheeks might have been caused by the heat of the room, but then he realised that he was wrong. Although outwardly his pale-faced, reserved, polite, awkward self there was now something at work inside. It was something bitter and shocking and only partly understood.

The first thing the boy expected was to have to answer questions. His defensive position told Mr. Wetherall that. Accordingly he asked him none at all. He talked for a time, in his easy way, to both of them, and soon after supper he sent Peter to bed.

"What's wrong with that boy?" said Mrs. Wetherall.

"Shock, wouldn't you think? Losing his father—"

"Yes, I know. But it's something more than that—I thought—I don't know."

Mr. Wetherall badly wanted to talk to someone about things. It would have been nice to talk to his wife, but the ice of years is not easily broken.

He supposed that there might be marriages, not just work-a-day, good-enough, bread-and-butter marriages like his own, but the true and lovely thing itself where no barriers existed and no reticence was possible.

His mouth was open to speak when the telephone rang in the hall.

It was Sergeant Donovan.

He said, "Have you got that boy there, Mr. Wetherall?"

"Yes, I've just sent him to bed."

"Best place for him. I rang up to warn you not to be surprised if you saw a couple of characters hanging about in the street. One of them might even be me."

"Why? What's up—?"

"Nothing in particular. We don't want to lose this one, do we?"

"No," said Mr. Wetherall. "Of course not. But has anything in particular—"

He was speaking to a dead telephone. Sergeant Donovan had gone.

He made his way slowly back to the sitting-room.

Later, in bed, Mrs. Wetherall said, "That telephone's a very

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loud speaker. You can hear every word from the drawing-room. Don't tell me if you'd rather not, but—"

Fortified by the friendly darkness, he lay back and told her everything.

At the end of it, and for perhaps the first time in their married life, she managed to surprise him.

"You always resented missing the war, didn't you," she said.

"Yes, I did," said Mr. Wetherall. "Why?"

"It looks as if you've got one on your hands now."

Then they both went to sleep.

THE DOUBLE FOUR

Nothing happened that night.

After breakfast Mr. Wetherall made three telephone calls. The first was to Peggy, telling her that he hoped to be in some time during the afternoon. He rang off, dialled TRUNKS and spoke for some time to a man called Ap-Lloyd, whom he seemed to know very well. After that his address book came into play again and he dialled a number at Wimbledon.

The telephone at the other end went on ringing for quite a long time, but Mr. Wetherall persevered. Finally there was a "clunk" and a sleepy voice said, "Todd here."

"It's Wetherall—Wilfrid Wetherall."

"Good God," said the voice. "I thought it was the News Editor. No one else would have got me out of bed. What the hell do you want?"

"Some information."

"What's in it for me?"

"Just at the moment," said Mr. Wetherall firmly, "nothing. Eventually, I really think, possibly something quite big."

"Crime?"

"I imagine so."

"All right. I'm not a crime reporter now, but fire away. Only try and make it snappy, because I haven't got my slippers on."

"Well, this is what it is. I want to find a place—I imagine it would be a restaurant or a night club, or a pub or something like that. The only thing I know about it is that those who are in the know call it the Aldershot Ladies."

"You don't want much, do you? Aldershot Ladies?"

"Yes."

"Ring you back."

When Peter Crowdy had repacked his one suitcase—he had pathetically few clothes but amongst them a set of good silk shirts a size too big for him—Mr. Wetherall took a cautious look out into the street.

He could see no one but the milkman and the lady from next door holy-stoning her front step. It was hard to be sure. A lot of people were passing and re-passing at the end of the road where the High Street crossed it.

He decided that a Wellingtonian simplicity was to be the order

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of the day. He went back to the telephone and rang up a Mr. Atkins. After inquiring about Mr. Atkins' family (it seemed that Mr. Atkins too, was an ex-Battersea pupil) he asked him if his cab was available.

"On the spot," said Atkins.

"Then would you please bring it round to the end of Brinkman Road. Don't turn in. Park it fifty yards up in the High Street, facing North. Exactly ten minutes from now. And keep the engine running."

Eight minutes later he and Peter let themselves out of the front door and walked down Brinkman Road. A man came out of the telephone box on the corner as they passed it, but otherwise their arrival seemed to cause no flutter. They crossed the road. The taxi was there all right. Atkins was leaning half out of the driver's seat, apparently doing something to his windscreen wiper.

As they came level, Mr. Wetherall exclaimed, "Let's take a cab." He pulled the door open, pushed Peter in, threw in the suitcase and jumped after him. The cab started with a wrenching jerk which threw them both on to the back seat, twiddled around a corner, slipped along a side street, turned right and left half a dozen times and emerged unexpectedly into the Walworth Road.

"Clean as a ruddy whistle," said Atkins cheerfully. "Didjer see 'em all running?"

"I'm afraid I hadn't time to look," said Mr. Wetherall.

"Three of 'em. Let 'em run. Won't catch us now. Where to?"

"Waterloo."

When Mr. Wetherall eventually got back to the school that afternoon he found a few matters waiting his attention. Sergeant Donovan had rung up, and had said that he would try to catch Mr. Wetherall that evening before he left. An unknown gentleman had telephoned, but he refused to state his business. Fifteen boys had been sick. The stew at lunch was suspected.

"Quiet morning really," said Peggy.

The telephone started again.

"Todd here. That business you were talking about this morning. 'Two Aldershot Ladies,' so my colleagues tell me, is a term used by the lower-income groups in connection with their pastime of darts.

"Most of the doubles on a dart board have got names. You know, like 'double-top'—that's double twenty, and 'double-bottom'—double three. And 'double-one'—"

"Up in Annie's room."

"That's the boy. I've got a young chap in the office here who's a bit of an expert. They're most of them sort of rhyming slang. 'Two-tens' becomes 'two fat hens' and 'two-eights' is 'china plates' and so on."

"Yes. But why Aldershot Ladies?"

"Two-fours."

"Why—oh—"

"Got it?"

"I think so," said Mr. Wetherall guardedly.

"There's a Road House called the Two Fours at Leytonstone. There is—or rather there was, I fancy it's shut down now—a night-

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club called the Twice Four and there's a pub in Lauderdale Street, near Dean Street, called the Double Four. I think the night club really is defunct."

"Yes. And come to think of it, it wouldn't be a night club. The man who said he was going there—it was about eight o'clock in the evening."

"All right. I'll look at the other two and let you know."

"It's very kind of you," said Mr. Wetherall.

"That's the way I'm built," said Mr. Todd.

At three o'clock on the following afternoon, Todd rang through.

"I don't think Leytonstone's much good," he said. "I wasted an afternoon there yesterday. The Lauderdale Street pub looks a bit more promising. I had a drink there last night. It's full of dim types, but that doesn't mean anything, because all Soho pubs are like that. Nobody tried to sell me anything. There's rather a pretty barmaid—"

Mr. Wetherall reflected.

"My wife is stopping with her mother at Bromley tonight and tomorrow night," he said. "She won't be back until Tuesday morning. Perhaps I could go up and have a look at it myself. I might see someone I recognized."

"You might. Or someone might see you."

"No harm in dropping in for a drink."

"I suppose not," said Todd. "It isn't a *den*—I mean, you don't have to sew your pockets up before you go in. Equally it isn't the sort of place you'd choose to take your Aunt Flossie for a quiet evening. This pub is side street. Definitely side."

"I used to go to Soho quite a lot before the war," said Mr. Wetherall. "I'll keep out of trouble—I'm only going to look—"

"All right," said Todd. "Ring me up on Tuesday and let me know how you get on."

When he reached Lauderdale Street, at about nine o'clock that Monday evening, Mr. Wetherall realized that he was in yet another Soho, of which he knew little. It was the Soho of the side streets, where the people who were at your service in the main streets lived and moved through their oddly regulated lives: lives which started with sundown and ended as the day was breaking.

At first sight the Double Four looked so uninviting that Mr. Wetherall nearly turned back. It was like no pub he had ever seen before, even in his own part of South London (where, indeed, they were usually glittering cases of light and life and respectability).

The windows and doors, which had been boarded against the blitz, were still nailed up. What had once been fresh woodwork was now between dark brown and black, oily with twelve seasons of fog and neglect. Someone had playfully spiked the head of a rabbit on the area railing. A dim light from behind an old black-out slit, illuminated the words SALOON BAR.

As he was hesitating a door swung open further along the street and a man came out. In the light of the door, before it shut again, he

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had time to take in such diverse items of dress as a kilt, a duffle coat, and a bowler hat. Then the newcomer was advancing towards him. He seemed to be carrying a small corpse under his left arm. As he came up to Mr. Wetherall he put out his right arm, wrapped it round Mr. Wetherall's shoulder, and said, in a voice in which the stage Scotsman fought an unequal fight with the cockney. "That's the boy. Were you taking a wee drappie? Come awa' in. I had just the same thought me sel'."

Having no free hand he kicked the door open and surged into the saloon bar with Mr. Wetherall obediently in tow.

"Whass yours?"

"No really."

"Double Scotch, Miss. And the same for my friend."

"Really, you're very kind—"

"Not at all," said the Scotsman. "I took an in-stan-taneous liking to you the moment I saw you." He removed the corpse, which turned out to be an old set of bagpipes, from under his arm.

The Scotsman disposed of his drink with a twist of the forearm and since he looked faintly expectant Mr. Wetherall ordered two more. His own went down more slowly. He had time to notice that it was very good whisky.

"Scots wha' hae," said his new friend. He got through his second drink at creditable speed, too. Mr. Wetherall bought him a third, but left himself out of the round.

"It's a long time since meself set eyes on you, Hector," his new friend observed. "Where have you been hiding?"

"I—"

"It was boat-race night, twa years syne. No, and it wasn't though. Don't tell me. It was the steps of St. Paul's, on Hogmanay." The thought affected him so powerfully that he sang a whole verse of *Auld Lang Syne*, in a strong voice. This brought the proprietress to the scene from the Private Bar.

She wasn't just one more woman. It was quite clear that she was Somebody.

The barmaid started polishing an already clean glass, and the Scotsman discontinued his singing and said, "How's tricks, Annie?"

"Quiet enough till you come in. What do you think this is? Second house at the Empire?"

It was her eyes that you noticed first. The white was very white and the brown was very shiny and brown, and the whole was set so far forward that you had a feeling that she could see, like the caterpillar, both forwards and backwards, without moving her head. Her hair was black and coarse and tightly drawn over her head.

"Do I know your friend?"

"Friend indeed. It's me cousin Hector, all the way fra' Aberdeen."

"The back of a picture postcard's the only place you've ever seen Aberdeen," said Annie. The voice had an overlay of professional bonhomie but there was clearly a whip in reserve.

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"You're unkind—" He looked so disconsolate that Mr. Wetherall bought him another glass of whisky, which cheered him up a lot.

Meanwhile Annie was trying to place Mr. Wetherall. You could almost see her, like a factory hand testing parts for gauge, fitting him into various sockets and slots, giving him a twist here and a twist there, and deciding that he didn't quite measure up. In the end she abandoned the game and said, "I guess you're a journalist. Am I right?"

"He's my second cousin Hector," said the Scotsman, "and he travels in corsets."

"Anyone who'll stand you a drink's your second cousin," said Annie.

"You insult me," said the Scotsman gravely.

"As a matter of fact," said Mr. Wetherall. "You're both wrong. I'm a schoolmaster."

"Well, there now," said Annie. "I guessed it was something to do with writing."

"Would you take a drink with me—?"

"I don't mind if I do. It'll be a gin and pep. Two and eleven. That's right. As a matter of fact I daren't drink anything else. This job's death to the lining of my stomach. Overwork and old age—"

"Overwork, perhaps," said Mr. Wetherall gallantly.

"Get away with you. And what are you doing in these parts?"

The question came sliding out of the froth like a blade out of a press.

"I was having dinner with someone," he said. "At Bernadi's. But they didn't turn up."

"Stood you up, did she?"

"As a matter of fact, it was a man."

"That's right, dearie." Annie gave a sharp, popping laugh. "Just a joke." During the next half hour, though customers came and went, Annie never entirely abandoned Mr. Wetherall. She seemed to have become quite attached to him.

In the intervals of nagging the barmaid, serving drinks, and keeping up her side of a marathon argument with an unseen gentleman in the private bar, she leaned over the counter and treated Mr. Wetherall to an account, in serial form, of the progress of her various ailments. The multitude of her afflictions, the skill and unexpectedness with which they attacked her, the occasional triumphs, the deadly set-backs.

"It's standing round on the feet all day," she said. "Many's the time I've gone to bed at the end of the day with a deathly feeling in my—those packets of biscuits are fivepence now, Beryl, do you think we give 'em away—the only things that done me any good was pads of heated cotton wool and regular doses of Bangalore Broth—I expect you've heard of it. There's a picture on the packet of a woman had symptoms just like mine and three tablespoonfuls of Bangalore Broth finished her right off.

"What'll it be, dearie? This one's on me."

Mr. Wetherall accepted a small whisky, and looked round for his

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friend, and found that he was asleep on the settle with his head on his bagpipes.

"You don't want to worry about him," said Annie. "Old Higgins is just a cadger. Plays the bagpipes to the queues in Leicester Square."

"It's funny the people you run across," said Mr. Wetherall. "I've been a schoolmaster in London most of my life, so I dare say I notice it more than most. I'm always running across boys I've taught. I can't always place them straightaway. The other day I sat next to one at a boxing match. At first I couldn't think of his name. Then I got it—Prince."

If Mr. Wetherall had happened to look up at that moment it is quite possible that he would have saved himself a lot of trouble. If he had seen the sudden, wary look that passed over Annie's face, and been able to interpret it, it seems likely that he would have gone straight home.

"Prince," said Annie. "That's quite a common name."

"Used to be a boxer, so he tells me. Then he lost an eye."

"Yes," said Annie. She had her back to him and was restacking a small pile of cigarette packets. "And you were his schoolmaster, were you? It's a small world isn't it?" She turned round. "What school would that have been?"

"Actually it was in Battersea."

"Battersea Park, Battersea Park," said the Scotsman, "Oh, the bonny bluebells of Battersea Park."

"You've woken up, have you?"

"Awake, my love, and thirsty."

"Perhaps I might—" began Mr. Wetherall hospitably.

"Now don't you do it," said Annie. "You've stood him plenty of drinks already. It's time he bought you one." Mr. Higgins shot her a dirty look.

He took out a wallet which seemed to contain more pound notes than Mr. Wetherall had ever seen in one wallet before, and said, "Make it half a pint of mild."

Now he had really begun to enjoy his evening, Mr. Wetherall was sorry when the clock hand reached eleven.

"Time, gentlemen," said Annie.

"Will I play you a wee tune on the pipes?" suggested Mr. Higgins.

"No."

"A lament for the closing of the day. Written by the great Rob Roy himself when they refused him a last drink at the Railway Tavern at Ardrishaig."

"Come along now. We don't want any trouble—your friend's going. You'd better go with him."

"All right," said Mr. Higgins. "All right. All right."

Outside in the street he linked his arm through Mr. Wetherall's and said, in the tones of one who has had an unexpected inspiration, "Why don't we go and have a drink?"

"The pubs will all be shut."

"Och, and awa' wi' ye," said Mr. Higgins. "There are plenty

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[NCC 780] PLAYER'S NAVY CUT CIGARETTES & TOBACCO

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of clubs." The idea sounded vaguely attractive. As they turned into Dean Street a name caught his eye. "Bernadi's." There was something odd about it. No lights. A notice in the window.

"It's no good trying there," said Mr. Higgins. "Closed for repairs."

"Oh." Mr. Wetherall had suddenly remembered something. It took him a moment to put his finger on it. Hadn't he told Annie that he was dining at Bernadi's with a friend. She must have known—

"How long's it been like that?"

"Months and months. Come along."

Obediently Mr. Wetherall moved after his new friend. Like a shadow, a tiny sense of disquiet moved with him.

Mr. Higgins' ideas on how to look for a club in Soho had the merit of simplicity. You looked into every basement until you saw a light. Then you went down and knocked.

After one or two unfortunate mistakes they found themselves at the door of the Minstrel Boy.

Mr. Wetherall paid and they went in. It seemed a popular place, even if it did not quite square up with Mr. Wetherall's idea of a night club. No floor-show, no band, no orchids, no champagne, and, rather to his disappointment, no female uncovered above the knee or below the neck. As much as it looked like anything else on earth, it looked like an up-to-date, well-run station buffet. They finally came to rest in a side room, where they sat for a long time whilst nothing much happened.

"Perhaps it's run on the cafeteria system," suggested Mr. Wetherall. "Do you think we ought to help ourselves?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Higgins. "Assert yourself."

He picked up a glass ashtray and clashed it on the table-top. Since the table was a metal one, the noise was considerable.

A middle-aged man at a neighbouring table whom they had supposed to be a fellow patron, put down his evening paper and asked what he could do for them.

"I would like some hot sausages and some beer," suggested Mr. Wetherall.

"How much of each?"

"Twenty sausages and a gallon of beer," said Mr. Higgins. "And make it snappy. The proprietor's a friend of mine."

"Very good," said the middle-aged man. He left the room.

Five minutes later he came back with two big Steins and a pitcher of beer, and asked, as he put it down on the table, "Would either of you gentlemen be Mr. Wetherall?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Higgins, before Mr. Wetherall could open his mouth. "My name's Freeman. This is Mr. Hardy."

"O.K., O.K.," said the man. He withdrew.

Mr. Higgins poured himself out a lot of beer and drank it. "Never does to tell 'em your name," he said. "Probably find it's someone you owe money to."

Even at that time of night Mr. Wetherall found it difficult to believe that his few and modest debts would have pursued him to a

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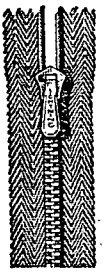

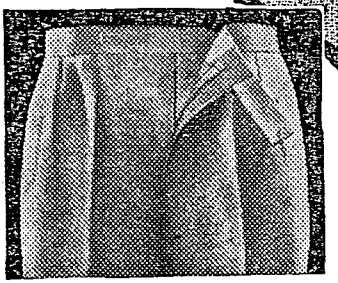

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club in a cellar in Soho. Something was happening in the main room. Voices were being raised and questions were being asked. The sense of unease, which had been in the background since Dean Street, suddenly took a decisive step towards him.

The waiter reappeared. He looked worried.

"Please come and talk to the gentlemen," he said. The words were plainly addressed to Mr. Wetherall. Mr. Higgins had settled down on the sofa with his bagpipes under his head.

In the outer room stood two men. They were both above ordinary height and wore belted raincoats and soft hats which yet contrived, somehow, to look like a uniform. "Mr. Wetherall?"

"Yes." At that they looked at him. It was a bleak, dispassionate look which he was to remember afterwards.

"I'm afraid we must ask you to come along with us."

"Where to? And what's it all about?"

"West End Central Police Station," said the man who had spoken first. He had reddish hair and a strong, red face, like a rough-riding, hard-drinking farmer. One of his eyes had a tiny spot of yellow in the iris. He lowered his voice slightly. "If it's any interest to you, it's about Crowdy."

"But I—"

"We don't want any trouble here, do we?"

"I suppose not," said Mr. Wetherall. Since he had made his mind up, all he was concerned with was to let no trace of it show on his face. "Do you mind if I get my coat?"

"Sure." The red-faced man nodded to his companion. He was a younger man, with a pale face under thick black hair. He followed behind Mr. Wetherall, but not too quickly or too closely for what Mr. Wetherall had in mind. As he reached the door leading into the room where he had been sitting, Mr. Wetherall quickened his pace, jumped through it, shut it behind him, and slipped home the bolt. It was a strong bolt: he had happened to notice it as he came out, and on it his impromptu scheme depended.

He was only just in time. As the bolt went into its socket a body thudded into the door from the other side.

At the noise, Mr. Higgins, now the only person in the room, sat up sharply and cried "Wassat?"

"Burglars," said Mr. Wetherall. "They're after your bagpipes."

"Over my dead body." The door shook again and a lump of plaster came out of the wall.

There was another door, in the far corner. Mr. Wetherall opened it and looked out. It led to a short, dimly-lit passage. There were further doors opening off it. The one on the left proved to be locked. The one on the right led to a coal cellar. As he tried the third, at the end of the passage, there was a crescendo of crashes behind him, and above him the faint, defiant squeal of bagpipes.

The third room was a small, dirty lavatory. Mr. Wetherall went into it and shot the bolt. He climbed on to the seat and tried the window. It was a ramshackle casement, its panes covered with whitewash. Mr. Wetherall was slim, and fear lent him agility. A

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few seconds later he was through and standing in a small area.

Mr. Wetherall stumbled across the area, which seemed to be knee-deep in bottles. Logic told him that there must be at least one corresponding window on the other side. There was.

He groped down and picked up a bottle. With it he knocked out the top pane of glass, then thrust his hand through and undid the latch. He pressed the bottom casement up, only discovering as the blood ran down his palm that he had by no means removed all the glass. In the excitement he felt nothing.

A light sprang up in the lavatory behind him.

He fairly dived through the window into warm, fluffy darkness. It was an inhabited room, with some sort of carpet on the floor. It smelt like a bedroom. At that moment the light came on. It was a bedroom. There was a very old man in bed. The man appeared to be deaf. He simply sat and stared, his mouth wide open.

With a strong feeling of unreality upon him Mr. Wetherall tiptoed to the door and opened it. He saw a flight of uncarpeted stairs ahead, and he went up them, into another passage not quite so dark. There was a door at the end of the passage, and it was obviously a street door. It was fastened. First he fumbled with the top bolt, then the bottom bolt. There was a chain in the middle, which he finally got off, at the cost of a clattering jangle.

A woman's voice said something from the room to the left of the door. Mr. Wetherall worked with clumsy speed in the dark. There was a safety lock, which he fastened open on the catch, and finally a big handle which he turned. The door still refused to move.

A shaft of light lit up the passage. The door on the left had opened. A dark woman, with her hair in curlers, looked out. "Henry. It's a burglar." Her voice sounded tiny and far off.

"I'm not a burglar," said Mr. Wetherall. "I'm trying to get out. Get *out*. Do you understand?" The woman gaped at him, with exactly the same air of disbelief he had already seen on the face of the man in the cellar. Then she said faintly, "The key's beside the door."

Mr. Wetherall looked up, and there it was, a large, old-fashioned key. He took it down, fitted it into the lock and turned it. The door opened and he stepped out into the street.

Two seconds later he realised, with a sense of apprehension, that it had all been a waste of effort. He had been running like a rabbit in a circle. The men who were after him understood the geography of Soho better than he did.

They were waiting for him in the street.

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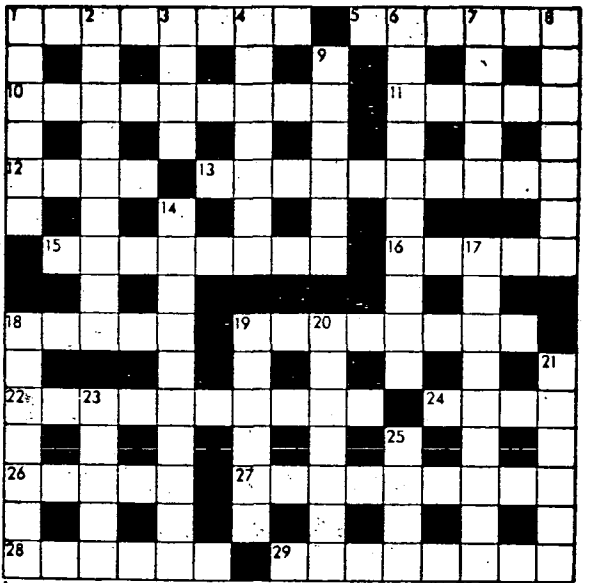

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## CLUES

### Across

**1** Two bipeds, no feet (8).

**5** Tedious method of oil extraction (6).

**10** Ruins love—it certainly would (9).

**11** Her musings are erotic (5).

**12** Fingerless, they wear rings (4).

**13** Strident loch ? (10).

**15** Toss oils ? No wonder they're all alone ! (8).

**16** Songs from here are coupled with tales of wild Cashmere (5).

**18** When I leave, the priest turns French (5).

**19** What's within is mostly satisfied (8).

**22** The glitter, not necessarily the gold (10).

**24** This cub may develop into a scout (4).

**26** What Mr. Eliot's world does not end with (1, 4).

**27** Entertainment in which a sylvan god is to play a silent part (9).

**28** Planks or problems may be (6).

**29** A tamer man may be made from weapons (8).

### Down

**1** Notorious—and novel—advertiser (6).

**2** Poetically ravenous negative (9).

**3** Swiss or nautical (4).

**4** Chivalrous ? Their every mood is crooked (7).

**6** Weighted cricket balls ? (10).

**7** That is a rodent inside (5).

**8** In bundles of 144 ? (7).

**9** " Her pretty feet Like — did creep " (Herrick) (6).

**14** Bright procession (10).

**17** Strangely enough, to do this is not the writer's function (9).

**18** Not a special status for taxi-drivers (3, 4).

**19** One hundred and fifty snakes—for Cleopatra perhaps (6).

**20** Apocryphal warrior, died in harness (7).

**21** Result that may also cause (6).

**23** I'm past the perfect insect (5).

**25** No artistic honours for this girl (4).

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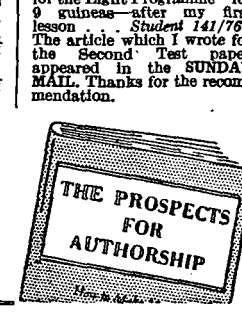


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